

Tamil **TIMES**

VOL XVII No. 4 ISSN 0266-4488 15 APRIL 1998 90p

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
UK/India/Sri Lanka£15/US\$25
AustraliaAus\$45
(Australian bank cheques only)
Canada Can\$40
USA US\$35
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The famous Nallur Kandswamy temple in Jaffna - Recent picture by Dr S Jothilingam

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*"I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it."*

-Voltaire

Tamil TIMES

ISSN 0266 - 44 88
Vol. XVII No. 4
15 APRIL 1998

Published by:
TAMIL TIMES LTD
PO Box 121, Sutton,
Surrey SM1 3TD
United Kingdom
Phone: 0181 644 0972
Fax: 0181 241 4557
Email: prajan@gn.apc.org

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

UK/India/Sri Lanka.....£15/US\$25
Australia.....Aus\$45
(Australian Bank cheques only)
USA.....US\$35
Canada.....Can\$40
All other countries..... £20.US\$35

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NEWS REVIEW

MASS ARRESTS IN COLOMBO CONDEMNED

There has been widespread condemnation of intensified and indiscriminate mass arrests of persons belonging to the island's Tamil community, running into several thousands, in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, and its suburbs during the last week of March. Though most of them have been released within days of them being taken into custody following so-called investigation, the sheer scale and sustained nature of the exercise is unprecedented. Human rights organisations and Tamil Members of Parliament have condemned these arrests as arbitrary, discriminatory, unwarranted and unjustified.

At least 5,000 Tamils were arrested during the last week of March in massive round-ups by security forces in the capital amidst uproar that the security forces were punishing the entire Tamil community to cover up for their inability to apprehend and prevent the real culprits who engage in violent bomb attacks allegedly by LTTE suicide squads.

As the arrests continued, the government stepped in to stem the growing tide of criticism against the injustice to the Tamil community as a whole at the altar of security and the island's Attorney General issued strict instructions on 2 April to security forces to end the mass arrests with immediate effect which came as a huge relief to a beleaguered people.

However, by the time that order was given, much of the damage had already been done as more than 5,000 Tamils were picked up at random from residential areas, hotels and lodges.

"It's safer to live in army controlled Jaffna than democratic Colombo, because here, it seems as if it is a crime just to have a Tamil name," said a senior Tamil journalist.

Around 2,000 Tamils living in the suburb of Wattale were shoved into police vehicles in the first of the

searches last week. Next, government forces targeted the suburbs of Dehiwela and Mount Lavinia, taking back with them nearly 1,500 people.

In yet another round-up, at least 1,500 Tamils living in transit lodges in Pettah, in the heart of the capital, were herded to the nearest police station for interrogation. As most of those who stay in these lodges are Tamil youth who have recently arrived from north-east Lanka, they are looked upon with greater suspicion than older residents.

In most instances of these crack-downs the arrested had to suffer long waits in inclement conditions.

In addition what has deeply concerned and perturbed many has been over the manner in which Hindu temples are subjected by the Defence forces through search operations and Hindu priests being arrested without any consideration for their religious position. The recent arrest and detention at the Maradana police station of the Chief Priest of the Captain's Garden Hindu Temple in Colombo along with his family and the similar arrest and detention of the Chief Priest of the Hindu temple at Slave Island Temple are being cited as cases in point.

The service personnel were also being accused of being disrespectful enough not to heed to the request made by the Chief Priest to remove their shoes, when they entered the sacred sanctity of Captain's Gardens Temple. Even though the Chief Priest pointed out to army personnel that this law was normally followed even by the President visiting the temple, army officials chose to ignore it arrogantly. Instances of these kind are being cited as examples of the difference between precept and practice in the context of the government's oft repeated assertion that all religions practised in the country should be

treated equally since Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country.

"The mass arrests and detentions and indiscriminate and arbitrary treatment of Tamils within the city of Colombo has caused unprecedented anger and pain of mind," Neelan Thiruchelvam, Member of Parliament of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), said in parliament recently.

"It has been estimated that within the last few days there were about 5,000 lawful residents of the city who were rounded up...and detained despite their production of valid documents to authenticate their legitimate presence within the city," he said during a monthly debate on extending emergency regulations.

The TULF also has made an official complaint to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka against the mass arrests. "We made our submissions to the Commission and they have agreed to take certain measures after they finish deliberations," Thiruchelvam told the press.

Police sources sought to justify the recent wave of cordon search and arrest operations as being necessitated by recent suicide bomb attacks in Colombo and other areas allegedly by the LTTE, and receipt of information by them of the penetration into the capital city by several suicide squads allegedly belong to the LTTE.

"We understand the security concerns but there is absolutely no need for thousands of people to be taken to police stations for questioning and detention there," Thiruchelvam added.

"Emergency rule compromises the rule of law, but we are alarmed and disturbed that even the minimum safeguards contained in the law are being violated with impunity," Thiruchelvam said.

"We have received innumerable complaints of cruel, callous and insensitive treatment of persons of all age groups, including women," he said.

The TULF has demanded a debate in the Parliament on arbitrary arrest and harassment of Tamils under the guise of security and if it is not granted, they threatened to bring a no-confidence motion against State Minister of Defence Anuruddha Ratwatte. Furthermore they also decided unanimously at Yesterday's Central Committee meeting that, the

LTTE's contribution is absolutely vital for the settlement of the Ethnic crisis.

Signals for Talks ?

There has been a flurry of speculation following recent press statements by the United National Party (UNP) leader that he and the government of Sri Lanka had received signals from the LTTE that it was prepared to commence talks.

The government of Sri Lanka says that neither it has made any moves nor has it received any 'signals' from the LTTE that it was prepared to commence talks. In fact the LTTE spokesmen in their most recent reported statement have said that the government of Sri Lanka would only end its war and engage in talks only after the LTTE had achieved parity of strength on the military front. The LTTE also insists on foreign mediation, but the government has ruled out any role for such mediation.

However, the UNP leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, told reporters on 26 March that the Tamil Tigers might be willing to enter into negotiations. "There have been various signals and indications that they (the Tamil Tigers) won't be averse to talks. What their strategy is I don't know," Wickremasinghe said.

"The signal has also gone to the government," he said. "I have also received some signal. But it is no longer a matter for me to decide. That's the matter for the government to decide," Wickremasinghe said without elaborating on from whom and as to what kind of signals he himself had received.

Denying knowledge of any moves by the LTTE to initiate negotiations, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Gamini Peiris told reporters, "Signal is a very vague word. As far as I know there has been nothing."

Despite signals the LTTE was ready to talk, Wickremasinghe said fighting in the northern Wanni region for a highway connecting from the government-held Vavuniya town through Kilinochchi further north to the Jaffna peninsula was likely to intensify. "LTTE is fighting every inch. The losses are very high. I don't think the Sri Lanka army has taken such losses in any other one single operation," he added. Wickremasinghe

pointed out the army had been bogged down for nearly a year in its attempt to capture the highway. Referring to the military operation Jayasikuru (Sure Victory) which began 13 May last year, he said "One year is very long in modern warfare."

Wickeremasinghe, who does not normally fail to pontificate on all other matters as to what the government should do, said it was for the ruling People's Alliance government to decide whether it wanted to continue fighting or lift a ban on the LTTE and talk to them. He himself did not express any view as to whether the government should stop fighting with LTTE, lift its proscription and negotiate with its leaders. The government officially outlawed the LTTE in January last after blaming the group for a blast at Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist shrine in the central town of Kandy which killed 16 people.

Wickeremasinghe said the government had lost a golden opportunity to create a consensus with the UNP over how to bring the war to an end. "We agreed to a bi-partisan arrangement. I think the government could have built on it. There was goodwill which no government has had from the opposition earlier," he said.

The UNP leader's expression of his desire to build a bi-partisan consensus and put the blame on the government for the failure to reach such a consensus is viewed with cynicism by discerning political commentators in Colombo particularly after the UNP's outright rejection of the government's devolution proposals. Having frustrated the efforts of the government to reach a consensus in the Parliamentary Select Committee for nearly three years, the UNP has come up late in the day with counter-proposals which are regarded as a diminution of even the devolution of powers currently provided under the 13th amendment to the Constitution. With such proposals, how the UNP leader hopes to entice the LTTE to give up fighting and reach a political solution to the ethnic conflict is something beyond comprehension, a commentator said.

In the meantime, the LTTE has indicated that it would be prepared to engage in talks with the government with third party mediation. The "Uthayan" newspaper published from northern Jaffna reported that

some prominent LTTE figures Tamil Chelvam, Vithuran, Sutha and including Anton Balasingham, who had been the primary spokesman for the LTTE for a number of years, had conveyed the LTTE's position to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna, Thomas Savundaranayagam, who was on a pastoral visit to the LTTE controlled areas in the northern Wanni region during the first week this month. The Bishop had emphasised on the dire necessity to end the war and bring about peace. The LTTE's political wing leaders had told the Bishop that the government was utilising its so-called devolution package to weaken the struggle for Tamil independence and pointed out that in any event there was no consensus between the government and opposition parties with regard to a political settlement. The government's military aims against the LTTE were failing, they had told the Bishop.

What is also apparent from this newspaper report is that Anton Balasingham has again re-emerged in public as spokesman for the LTTE following months of persistent reports that either he had been sidelined and put under house arrest by the LTTE leader or that he was incapacitated by serious illness.

"Foreign Intervention"

The United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Karl Inderfurth, is to visit Colombo on 18 April, as part of his trip to other South Asian countries to review preparations for the forthcoming visit of President Clinton to the region. Richardson, the senior most U.S. official to visit Sri Lanka since a 1972 visit by the then Secretary of State William Rogers. The previous U.S. Secretary of State to visit Sri Lanka was John Foster Dulles, who went there in 1956 and visited his grandmother's grave in northern Jaffna town.

Richardson is to have wide-ranging talks with the government and is also expected to meet leaders of opposition parties, including Tamil parties, and address a news conference in Colombo.

Also to visit Colombo in the near future is the British Deputy Secretary

of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Derrick Fchette. He is said to be interested in reviving the bi-partisan approach between the government and the opposition UNP which was previously promoted by his predecessor Liam Fox.

The visits of Richardson and Fchette to Colombo would appear to driven certain sections of the Colombo media into a state of paranoia about alleged "foreign intervention" in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka by trying to force the government to enter into a cease-fire and negotiations with the LTTE. These sections of the press are normally anti-government and against the government's devolution proposals and also for the uninterrupted continuation of the war without any sort of negotiations.

Without giving a thought to the thousands who are being killed in this war, the "Devaina" (8 April 1998) editorially said, "The Tigers are rapidly losing their military might in the North and their last major base Mankulam is also under siege. So they will naturally jump for an opportunity to earn some respite to regroup themselves again. It seems they are getting this opportunity thanks to some foreign intervention in the form of US Ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson, British Deputy Secretary on Commonwealth Affairs, Derrick Fchette, and US Deputy Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth, The purpose of their visit to Sri Lanka is to start peace talks between the government and the LTTE. These mediators are of the opinion that a cease-fire should be declared before any peace talks and this is precisely what the LTTE needs now. It is said that the LTTE has also been asked by them to recognise the political package presented by the government. We all know that if the LTTE ever does that, it is not because of any attraction to the package, but it is because they need the cease-fire so badly. So many times the Tigers had unilaterally violated cease-fires after achieving their objective to regroup and consolidate themselves, and no soothsayer is necessary to predict the same outcome this time as well. Even our defence chiefs, who had to bear the brunt of such idiotic actions in the past, are strongly against a cease-fire. What has these foreigners got to intervene in our affairs?"

UNP's Internal Problems

The United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka's main opposition party, has ended its month-long boycott of parliament amidst quite a number of internal problems. The UNP had launched the boycott on March 3 to protest what it said was an erosion of democratic values in the country.

As the UNP returns to Parliament, the issue of one of its high-ranking and influential Member of Parliament of the party, the former Minister, Wijeyapala Mendis, is continuing to haunt the party and its leadership. It is causing grave problems of credibility for the party's campaign against alleged corruption by ruling party politicians.

The former Minister has been found guilty by a Special Commission of benefiting from fraudulent land transactions while the UNP was in power, and the Commission has recommended that his civic rights be deprived. A motion is presently before parliament to implement that recommendation which, if passed, would mean that he would be expelled from parliament, cease to be an MP and lose his civic rights for a period of seven years.

The UNP leadership would like Mendis to resign his seat voluntarily before the motion is taken up for debate in the parliament, but he has refused to do so. Some sections of the party which are thoroughly embarrassed by Mendis's refusal to resign are accusing the leadership of soft-peddling the issue because of the power that Mendis wields in the party and outside. It is not insignificant that despite the findings of guilt by the Special Commission, Mendis continues to remain the Chief National Organiser of the UNP.

As for Mendis himself, he recently told his supporters in his Katana constituency that he would definitely not resign from the Parliament since he had not committed any crime to necessitate it and insisted that UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe is also aware of his position. Some in the UNP doubt his claim of innocence when Mendis himself has given in writing to the Special Commission which did the investigation an undertaking agreeing to reverse the land deal of which he was accused of thereby in-

directly admitting his guilt.

It is also said that when Mendis met his party leader, he had insisted firmly that just because some members of the Party and certain outsiders wanted his resignation, he was not willing to oblige and accept defeat so easily and withdraw.

Mr. Mendis is also said to have challenged the Party leadership to convene a meeting of the UNP Parliamentary Group and allow him to explain matters to them and take a vote on his resignation. He has offered to resign immediately if the majority votes in favour of it. Those UNP MPs who want him to resign are said to be agreeable to give him a chance to explain his position at a UNP Parliamentary group meeting, but this is said to be very unlikely to take place as the party leadership feels that such a confrontation will create a serious split in the parliamentary group itself.

The Battle of the "Opportunists"

In recent weeks the country witnessed a rather unseemly quarrel between two leading figures in the UNP. Ronnie De Mel and Anura Bandaranaike have been engaged in a verbal dual abusing each other in disparaging terms. Both have accused each other of opportunist and improper conduct. As for opportunism, Ronnie de Mel could any day beat Anura by several lengths.

Anura crossed over to the UNP from the SLFP founded by his father who himself crossed over from the UNP to lead his new party in the 1950s. Anura joining the UNP had very little do with policy or politics. Not that he loved the UNP more, but because he loved his elder sister Chandrika less who beat him to the leadership of the SLFP and thereafter became President.

As for Ronnie, he was in his earliest political incarnation a leading member of Philip Gunawardene's Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, then he joined the SLFP under the leadership of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike and thereafter he joined the UNP to become the longest serving Finance Minister in President J R Jayawardene. Subsequently he fell out with Premadasa who was later to become President and joined the SLFP. Then he went into self-imposed exile for a

few years, mostly living in London. Following the assassination of President Premadasa and Gamini Dissanayake, Ronnie returned to the UNP after Ranil Wickremasinghe became its leader.

What provoked the slanging match between the two remains a mystery. It was Ronnie who went public first with the accusation that Anura and his family of Bandaranaike had engaged in fraudulent transfer of hundreds of acres land in contravention of the Land Reform Law which was enacted by the SLFP when it was in power claiming that he had in his possession copies of deeds of to prove his allegation. Proclaiming that he and his family had freely given their enormous wealth and land to the state and other charitable causes, Ronnie in a rather terse and intemperate encounter with the Sunday Times correspondent, Roshan Peiris, is reported to have said, "The trouble is that Anura thinks that we are slaves like those in the SLFP, like the Ilangaratnes and Maitripalas who bowed their heads always.... I am a de Mel and my type are not used to eating dankuda (crumbs) that fall from the table."

Anura hit back with accusations of downright opportunism and double-dealing against Ronnie and even alleged that he was cosying up with President Kumaratunga to cross over to the PA and become a Minister in her cabinet. It is true that there was a time in the recent past that Ronnie had met the President more than once and offered his support for the government's devolution proposals. In fairness to him, it must be noted that Ronnie strongly supported the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987 along with Gamini Dissanayake and stood with President Jayawardene when the then Prime Minister Premadasa and Lalith Athulathmudali were trying their best to scuttle it even after it was signed. However, now that Ronnie had attacked the Bandaranaike family as a whole of impropriety and fraud and gone to the extent of denigrating the SLFP and its erstwhile leaders, any hopes that he has of being inducted into the Kumaratunga cabinet must have evaporated.

It had been rumoured that Anura was aiming to contest the forthcoming Provincial Council elections aiming to become the Chief Minister of

the Western Province which includes the capital Colombo. It was from this high profile position as Chief Minister that Chandrika had graduated politically first to become Prime Minister and later President. It is said some of those in the UNP leadership did not want Anura to become Chief Minister fearing that he become uncontrollable and even challenge the incumbent for the UNP leadership.

Some see Ronnie's outburst against Anura as part of a campaign to cut him and his ambitions to size, and in this context Ranil Wickremasinghe's relative silence as the verbal dual between the two stalwarts of the UNP escalated is seen as very significant. In fact in an interview Anura had with the Sinhala weekly, "Irida Lankadeepa", he indirectly criticised the UNP leader by saying that his clash with Ronnie De Mel got aggravated to the level of a serious crisis because of faults in the UNP party leadership, adding that when Ronnie made insulting statements about him, no one in the party leadership ever bothered to contradict them or set matters straight. What is seen as more significant is the UNP leader's announcement that Karu Jayasuriya, the present Mayor of Colombo, would be the party's candidate for the Western Provincial Council Chief Minister's post in the forthcoming election.

Another rumour that is in currency is that the post of Prime Minister may soon fall vacant due to the advanced age of Mrs. S Bandaranaike who is said to be very anxious that the political split in the family should be bridged, particularly between her second daughter Chandrika and her only son Anura both of whom have engaged in unseemly and vitriolic personal attacks on each other in public. It is said that the mother would like Anura to rejoin the SLFP and see him succeed as Prime Minister. While it is considered that Chandrika will, tooth and nail, fight against this move, the UNP leadership may fear that this is a likely scenario and therefore has already decided to sideline Anura.

On the Battlefield

The Sri Lankan government's longest military offensive, Jayasikuru, against the Tamil Tigers entered its twelfth month on 13 April without any sign of securing the land route from

Vavuniya to northern Jaffna which was the initial objective of the operation when it was launched on 13 May 1997.

Since the thousands of Sri Lankan troops backed by warplanes, tanks and artillery have attempted to wrest control of a northern highway that cuts across the Wannai heartland most which has been under the control of the Tamil Tigers.

The initial optimism in military and government circles of a quick success in subduing the Tigers and securing the highway has vanished into thin air amidst unprecedented casualties. The Tigers while putting up heavy resistance have also suffered tremendous casualties. The operation has turned into a protracted war of attrition and some have dubbed it as the battle for the highway of death.

Some government politicians have comforted themselves by saying that normally guerrilla wars don't finish on a fixed like a conventional war which would end on a particular day with the surrender of one party and victory for the other. But the fact is one is not talking about the end of the war, but the battle for the highway that has dragged on for nearly a year.

The problem for the military is that it does not have enough men to deploy in newly-taken areas. Though there was a rush to join the army after the successful operation in taking over of Jaffna in late 1995, since then there is hardly any one volunteering to be recruited. In addition a high rate of desertion has also added to the military's woes. Several amnesties in the past have yielded little and the number of deserters is estimated at between 12,000-15,000, according to military officials say.

While no one knows the numerical strength of the LTTE, according to the army commander, the LTTE's strength had been reduced in recent years from a probable high of about 15,000 fighters to some 6,000 cadres adding that the Tigers still had enough firepower to retain their ability to hit the security forces with mortars and artillery at frequent intervals.

Though the State Minister of defence goes often to the war front himself to boost the morale of soldiers, and promised that the capture of Mankulam would be completed and the land route to Jaffna would be

opened before the Sinhala-Hindu New year (14 April), the forces are still stuck in the same place when the Minister made the promise. One month has elapsed since their attempt to capture Mankulam which is just 7 kilometres away.

It is said that the Defence chiefs are baffled and confused by the survival ability of the Tigers and their inability to open the land route even after 11 months of fighting. When Jaffna was captured, the Defence forces boasted about how they had broken the back bone of the Tigers. What has been evident from the way that the Tigers had resisted the army's offensive during past several months is that the backbone of the Tigers is still intact.

Today in the Wannai, Mankulam and Kilinochchi have become the main battle centres. Meanwhile the LTTE is also launching sporadic guerrilla attacks in the eastern province where they have gained more territory and even penetrating into Jaffna where they are engaged in hit and run attacks on soldiers.

Operation Jay Sicker is not only the longest single operation that the military has so far undertaken. In terms of casualties, weapons lost or destroyed, and the money spent, it has proved to be the most expensive. It is learnt that the govt has been spending RS. 1.4 million every day, and up to now a total of Rs.4,320 million has been spent to finance it in addition to Rs. 1,000 million worth armaments being either lost or destroyed.

Religious Business

Ven. Madhuluwawe Sobhitha thero of the Sinhala Commission fame was seen running around in luxury vehicles owned by a millionaire businessmen in the Polonnaruwa area these days. He was not there to spread the sacred word of Lord Buddha, but to buy paddy from farmers, as part of a business run by a certain organisation known as the Sinhala Weera Widhana Foundation (SWWF). In competition with the government-owned Paddy Marketing Board, the venerable monk was offering to buy paddy from farmers (only from Sinhala-Buddhist farmers and not others), who are harvesting their crop these days, at a higher price than they

would otherwise get. There was of a catch in the monk's offer. To receive the higher price, the farmers should become members of SWWF which is an extremist Sinhala-Buddhist outfit in which the monk plays a leading role.

Rev. Sobitha who once defined a true Buddhist monk as a person who has given up all wealth and worldly pleasures was certainly not acting in terms of his own definition. The paddy was being bought at Rs. 9.00 a kilo from the farmers, later to be sold to the CWE for Rs. 9.50 a kilo. This is business without pleasure but with profit indeed!

One must not be unduly unfair to Sobitha. Profit was not his only motive. The SWWF has been in the forefront of the campaign against the government's devolution proposals aimed at settling the ethnic conflict. By offering a slightly higher price for their paddy, provided the farmers become members of the Foundation, the intention of Sobitha and his associates is to rope in literally thousands of farmers into their organisation with a view to mobilising them into a powerful political campaign against the government.

Minister of Post, Telecommunication, Information and Media, Mangala Samaraweera described the Sinhala Commission report as charter for treachery thereby incurring the wrath of Sobitha and other highly placed monks who demanded a public apology from the Minister. Unless the Minister grovelled and apologised, Sobitha threatened to go round the country visiting temples and breaking coconuts to invoke divine anger against the Minister who continued to remain unrepentant.

Minister Samaraweera at a recent press conference said with reference to Sobitha's recent priestly business venture stated: "In the Polonnaruwa district, where a mix of Muslims and Tamils live with Sinhalese, the communal organisation "Sinhala Weera Widhana Foundation" headed by Ven. Maduluwawe Sobhitha thero, is buying paddy only from Sinhalese farmers. He is also given a Pajero Jeep by two private sector organisations for this purpose. These Buddhist Bhikkus, who should only be concerned about teaching the Buddhist philosophy and practising the doctrine, have taken to such acts that makes me ashamed of being a Bud-

dhist". One wonders whether Sobitha is going to break more coconuts to invoke devine wrath against the Minister.

Priestly Objection

It seems Ven. Rambukwelle Sri Wipassi thero, chief prelate of Malwatte chapter, in response to a government proposal to enlist foreign, including Indian, assistance in the restoration of the Dalada Maligawa, the temple of Buddha's tooth relic, has reportedly stated that he was vehemently against using foreign assistance and imported material to reconstruct the devastated Dalada Temple in Kandy. The chief prelate of Asgiriya chapter Channananda Palipanne thero is also reported to have expressed his dissatisfaction about the government's proposal.

The priestly objection has come in the context of the government's proposal too seek Sri Lanka help from India and Germany to restore the Dalada Maligawa. It is said that the entrance, outer wall, roof and some other parts of the temple sustained extensive damage due to the explosion. According to the Commissioner of the Archaeological Department, the moonstone and other portions of immense artistic, archaeological and cultural value were also destroyed by the explosion.

His department was doing all it could to restore all sections destroyed in the explosion. Photographs of the damaged parts had been presented to Indian Director General of Archaeology Professor Ravo for advice. Assistance had similarly been sought from Germany.

When in actual fact what is all about Dalada Maligawa is imported and foreign, one cannot understand the objection to the proposal to renovate the damaged Temple with foreign help. Prince Sidhartha, who later became the Buddha and gave birth to Buddhism, was certainly not a Sinhalese, not even a Sri Lankan. He was an Indian. If what is reputedly located in the sanctum sanctorum of the Dalada Maligawa is really his tooth, then the relic itself must have been imported from India where he died. The tooth relic of the Buddha was taken in the 16th century to Kandy where in 1590 AD a two-storey temple was built by King Wimaladharm

Suriya I and later enlarged by King Narendra Sinha. The Pattiruppuwa, the distinctive gold and copper-roofed octagonal structure from which the Kings addressed their subjects was added in the 19th century by none other than an Indian who assumed the Sinhalese name of Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe when he assumed the Kandyan throne. He was betrayed by the Kandyan chiefs to the British who arrested and deported him back to his homeland, India.

BRIEFS

LTTE Press Reports Ban Lifted

Following protests from journalist organisations, the Sri Lankan government has agreed to an amendment to exclude journalists from being prosecuted under a law banning contact with the LTTE. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said on 4 April, "It is going to be amended. It will exclude journalists getting faxes and talking to them (Tigers)."

In January, the government formally outlawed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after blaming them for a bomb attack at the Dalada Maligawa, a Buddhist shrine in the hill town of Kandy. The ban said any person who communicated any "order, decision or declaration or exhortation" made by the LTTE, or on their behalf would be liable to imprisonment for between seven and 15 years.

The ban had raised fears among journalists, who regularly receive LTTE press statements from the LTTE's London offices and include them in their reports, that they could be prosecuted under the law. But Kadirgamar said the notification was now being amended to ensure that journalists could continue to work freely.

The ban notification already excludes various organisations engaged in humanitarian work in the war affected areas.

CLARKE CLEARED TO BE KNIGHTED

Science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke said 8 April that he had been assured he could be knighted at Buckingham Palace, London, after he was cleared of child abuse allegations.

"I am delighted," he said from his

home in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo. "I hope to come over to London later this year. This is the final accolade."

Sir Arthur, 80, said he had received the news in a fax from his lawyers in London, who had made telephone contact with Palace officials.

The news came after Sri Lanka police said they had found no evidence to support allegations in a British newspaper that the author of 2001: A Space Odyssey was a paedophile.

The strenuously-denied allegations led him to postpone his investiture ceremony, due to take place during the visit to Sri Lanka by the Prince of Wales in February, to avoid embarrassing the royal visitor.

"Having always had a particular dislike for paedophiles, few charges could be more revolting to me than to be classed as one. However, as I have already said, the allegations are wholly denied," Clarke said at the time the newspaper report appeared.

The British-born writer, who has lived in Sri Lanka since 1956, said: "My lawyers said the Palace had confirmed that as the investiture was postponed at my request, it could go ahead at the Palace. "I have to let them know when I can come. I would come at any time, but it depends on my health, which is erratic at the moment."

Of the allegation that he had paid for sex with young boys, made in the Sunday Mirror, London, days before the Prince's visit, he said: "It caused me a lot of annoyance, though I was never worried."

Sri Lanka's Deputy Inspector General of Police M S M Nizam, said that they were "satisfied that he has not violated any Sri Lankan laws or committed any crime".

Human Rights Subcommission

Two Sri Lankans have been elected to a subcommission of the Geneva-based U.N. Commission on Human Rights for a four-year term.

Former Principal of the Ceylon Law College and prominent lawyer R K W Gunasekera was elected as a full member of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and well-known human rights activist and university don, Dr Deepika Udugama as an alternate member.

CHARLES ABEYSEKERA

Sri Lanka has lost another of her proud sons with the passing away of Mr. Charles Abeysekera on Friday, April 3, 1998. His demise at the crucial time when his continued contribution is so desperately needed to help in pulling the country out of the dangerous rut it has been pushed into by opportunistic leaders is very unfortunate. Given the alarming trends in the decline in social values and in the neglect of social justice and human rights in Sri Lanka, it is frightening to imagine what the future holds for all Sri Lankans, when humanitarians of the calibre of Charles Abeysekera are no longer with us to expose and condemn the injustices of those wielding power.

Although Abeysekera is best known to many Lankans for his dedicated work as a committed defender of human and fundamental rights in Sri Lanka, he also excelled as an efficient and dedicated civil servant. As a public servant, he served admirably under various governments and eventually retired as the Chairman of the Steel Corporation in 1977. He was specially chosen by the then United Front government to lead the corporation when it was experiencing managerial problems. Whatever task that was assigned to him, he was known for accomplishing it without confronting anyone, working in harmony with others as a humble officer carrying out his assigned responsibilities. Although his later work in non-governmental organisations occasionally compelled him to disagree with the authorities in the State apparatus, he was tactful but firm in dealing with them.

After his retirement from government service, he organised the Social Scientists' Association (SSA) in which many notable academics and social scientists collaborated with him. Its contribution during that time helped to satisfy a much desired need of academics and others interested in studying the causes of the social problems in Sri Lanka. The issues discussed at various meetings and seminars organised by the SSA were helpful for understanding the real causes of many social, economic and politi-

cal problems. It was during the course of one of these seminars presided by Abeysekera, at which the first writer of this tribute presented a paper on "The Financial, Social and Economic Gaps in the Open Economy" and came to know intimately the enlightened thinking and the admirable qualities of Abeysekera. This seminar took place after the 1983 anti-Tamil riots, Tamil opinion was strongly antagonistic towards all southern-based political parties to the extent of complete loss of confidence in the system of governance that permitted discrimination against the Tamils. He summed up succinctly in one sentence the mood and thinking of the Tamil community at that time: the cry for separation was the spontaneous reaction of the Tamils to the discriminatory policies of the State that made them feel insecure and vulnerable. The words, tone and the manner in which he articulated his view revealed his sincere understanding of the reasons for the anguish of the Tamils. He was well suited for the appointment by the present Government as Chairman of the Official Languages Commission, a post he held during the last few years along with his other commitments.

The selection of Mr. Abeysekera as a member of the team to visit Jaffna in April 1995 and talk with the LTTE was also in recognition of his sympathetic views on the grievances of the Tamils. If not for broad-minded Sinhalese leaders in the likes of Mr. Charles Abeysekera, hardly anyone among the minority communities would have the confidence to believe in the viability of a political solution to crisis that faces Sri Lanka.

He was the President of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) at the time of his death. He also played a leading role in the Civil Rights Movement and Human Rights Task Force. He was a founder of the Asia Forum for Human Rights, based in Bangkok. The tribute paid by the world famous human rights organisation, Amnesty International to Mr. Abeysekera in their condolence message conveyed to the people all over the world is a testi-

mony of his dedicated work as a defender of human rights over a long period.

Amnesty international stated: "In the year in which Amnesty International is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is very sad to lose this champion of human rights who has dedicated so much of his life to the promotion of human rights as indivisible and universal.

The Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), became one of the oldest and leading organisations in Sri Lanka that consistently worked for, as its name indicates, justice, equality and ethnic harmony that inhabit the island. Functioning under its founding President Fr. Paul Caspersz during its first few years, the document entitled "Ten Days of Terror" authored by a delegation of the MIRJE that visited Jaffna in the aftermath of the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in May 1981 graphically describes the widespread violence let loose by a rampaging battalion of security service personnel. Abeysekera later succeeded Fr. Caspersz as President and continued the work of MIRJE with tireless and unwavering commitment until his dying day. Whether in the field of human rights or in his academic career as a social scientist, his work was rooted in a passion for social justice. He was a sharp observer of political developments in the country and his contributions to the defence of human rights have been tremendous. Many will mourn the death of a great human being."

Abeysekera was also an ardent defender of media freedom and freedom of expression. His talent as a writer became public knowledge after his retirement. He was a leading art critic and a writer on culture, human rights and current affairs. Recognising the sectarian bias and self-censorship that characterised the national print media in Sri Lanka which sought to mould public opinion in the image of its proprietors and editors, through the MIRJE, it was Abeysekera who was primarily instrumental in launching of the Sinhala weekly journal *Yukthiya*, the columns of which have been used in campaign for negotiated and just political solution to the ethnic crisis. Under his leadership, MIRJE has also been funding the publication of a Tamil weekly journal

"Sarinihar". He has also been the founder co-editor with Jayadeva Uyangoda of "Pravada" (Alternative View), a scholarly journal concerned with contemporary political, social, economic and literary issues in Sri Lanka. He has also contributed several articles on civil rights and social issues to other journals published in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka and its people have already benefited from the historic contribution made by Abeysekera and institutions with which he was associated and this contribution has to be judged in its historical context.

The post-1956 period witnessed the onward march of the ideology of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism which was seeking to impose its hegemonic domination. Those were the days when the Eksath Bikku Peramuna, Baudha Jathika Balawegaya, the Sinhala Bala Mandalaya, the K M P Rajaratnes, the L H Mettanandas, the P de S Kularatnes, the N Q Diasas, the F R Jayasuriyas, and their ilk were in a position of such uncontrollable power and influence that they could force the main political parties to adopt the policies they demanded. The forces these organisations and individuals represented could make and unmake governments. These forces had assumed an autonomy of their own outside the framework of established political parties. The result was that the two major political parties at that time discarded even their pretence of being national parties representing all the different ethnic communities inhabiting the country and adopted policies and practices demanded by these forces which in short wanted to convert Sri Lanka into Sinhala-Buddhist theocratic state.

What was lamentable was that even the left political parties, having adopted the parliamentary road, could not resist these reactionary forces and gradually began to surrender their previously adopted progressive positions. This was the situation in the 1960s and 1970s when Tamil militancy and separatism began to emerge and the ethnic conflict began to escalate. The political party establishment, whether of the right or left, having become prisoners of the powerful forces outside, did not have even the space or capacity to debate the fundamental causes of the emerging and escalating crisis.

It is in this context, beginning in the mid-1970s, that the real debate began to intellectually confront the forces representing the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist ideology outside the political party establishment with the formation of organisations like the Civil Rights Movement, Social Scientist Association, Centre for Society and Religion, Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, the Marga Institute, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies etc. These organisations, in which many intellectuals, academics, social scientists, religious personalities, trade unionists, human rights activists and even members of political parties in their individual capacity participated, became the epicentre of a concerted and unrelenting campaign of ideological debate confronting the forces of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. Production, publication and circulation of a countless number of well researched and argued books and papers deconstructing the myths and mysticism of the imagined concepts that characterised Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, promoting the concepts of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, and advocating a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict became the central task of these organisations. With the same aim, frequent public seminars, meetings and debates were held in many parts of the country.

If political parties like the UNP and the SLFP, which previously had been incapacitated to act independently because they had become captives of outside reactionary forces of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism, in the late 1980s and now in the 1990s have become reconciled with policies advocating devolution of power and regional autonomy, albeit of varying kinds and degrees, that must surely be to the credit of the historic contribution made by persons like Abeysekera and others including organisations with which they associated to which reference has been made in the previous paragraph. Apart from some belonging to the lunatic fringe of extremist sectarian organisations, today in Sri Lanka there is no one advocating that Sinhala should be the only official language, that the plantation Tamils should be deprived of citizenship and voting rights, or that the Provincial Council system set up under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of

July 1987 should be abolished. In fact, the current debate has shifted to a different and a higher level - whether there should be more powers that should be devolved and greater autonomy should be given to the regions including the Tamil regions. That even the Sinhala Commission, in their recent report, accept the devolution of powers under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution while opposing any further extension as proposed under the present government's proposals is indicative of the shift in the level of debate.

Abeysekera will be missed immensely by all who were close to him and knew his efforts to protect the rights of all the citizens of Sri Lanka. He firmly believed in the equality of all the people, regardless of ethnic, religious, caste and class differences. He was a father figure and a paragon to many academics, old and young. The institutions founded by him are the legacy that he has left for the present and future generations of human rights defenders and researchers in social sciences.

The most fitting way to remember him is to continue the work that he started with great determination to ensure social justice and equal rights to all citizens and to safeguard these principles as well as their fundamental rights as members of a free society at all times. His efforts must not be allowed to fail, although he is no longer with us. The amiable, kindly, unassuming, self-effacing, mild-mannered, and ever friendly Charlie, as he has been fondly addressed by his many friends, will be remembered for a long time.

- **Dr. S Narapalasingam
and P Rajanayagam**

AI Tribute

"In the year in which Amnesty International is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is very sad to lose this champion of human rights who has dedicated so much of his life to the promotion of human rights as indivisible and universal.

"Both his role as the Chairman of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, one of the leading and oldest human rights organisations in Sri Lanka, and his academic career were rooted in a passion for social justice.

He was a sharp observer of political developments in the country and his contributions to the defence of human rights have been tremendous.

THE CHALLENGES THAT FACE THE SINHALA AND TAMIL COMMUNITIES

By Charles Abeysekera

Political relations between the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups have been based upto now on concepts of a majority and a minority. And the concept of a majoritarian democracy has been used to impose on the minority a set of discriminatory practices that denied them their democratic rights. I do not wish to dwell upon all these aspects but mention should be made of the primacy given to Buddhism and to Sinhala, the religion and language of the majority and to the process of State-aided colonisation which had the effect of diluting the population in areas of Tamil majority. These discriminatory practices continued despite Tamil protests which were peaceful and within constitutional bounds; however, the situation deteriorated, with pogroms and riots in which the Tamils were the victims, to the point where they were forced to conclude that the Sri Lankan State was no longer able or willing to assure them security of life and property. This in turn led to the demand for a separate State and the resort to arms to achieve that objective.

It is this kind of relationship which the (devolution) proposals now seek to replace with a new relationship which rejects the notions of majoritarianism and puts in its place the idea of equality between the ethnic groups. It recognises the collective rights of the Tamil ethnic group by recognising their right to autonomy and self-governance in the areas predominantly inhabited by them. It also creates the political mechanisms necessary to ensure the exercise of these rights. It is in this sense that I assert that the proposals presented by the government are a radical restructuring of political relations between the ethnic groups living in this country.

This change poses enormous problems and challenges, albeit different in nature, before both the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Let me take the Sinhala community first.

Most Sinhalese have always been

prepared to accept the Tamil as a citizen and his right to enjoy all the privileges and benefits of citizenship on a basis of equality with Sinhalese citizens. This is accepted as an individual right. But it does not lead to the acceptance of rights that should be enjoyed by them as a community with an identity that is different from the Sinhalese. There is thus a reluctance to accept their language or their religion on a basis of equality. This leads to very odd situations, for example, the provisions of the current Constitution that declare that Sinhala is the

Mr. Charles Abeysekera passed away on 3 April 1998. This extract is taken from an article he wrote after the original draft devolution proposals of the government were announced. It was published in the Christian Worker, 2nd & 3rd Qrs. 1995 (October) under the title "A Qualitative Change in Sri Lanka's Politics".

official language and that Tamil is also an official language. The reluctance is greatest when it comes to accepting the right of Tamils to self-governance in their areas.

This position is articulated by vocal Sinhala nationalists in the concept that our society, contained within the geographical boundaries of the island, has always been and is even now a Sinhala-Buddhist society and that it is the duty of the State to preserve that particular nature of our society. They argue that the Sinhala-Buddhist is tolerant of difference and that non-Sinhala and non-Buddhist persons can live within the confines of that society as long as they do nothing to affect or harm its basic characteristic. The demand for regional autonomy or for a separate State is seen as definitely altering the basic character of this society. The slogan

that is now being advanced against the proposals, that they would lead to a "break-up of the country" derives its political and emotional strength from this attitude.

This concept also has a political corollary. The essentially Sinhala-Buddhist nature of the society can only be maintained by a unitary State, that is a State with a single legislature, a single executive and a single judiciary. The often unspoken argument here is that such a State will always be controlled by the Sinhala-Buddhist majority and will serve its interests. The commitment to a unitary State is often supported by historical and emotional arguments, even to a position of ludicrousness when it is falsely asserted that Sri Lanka has been a unitary State from the time of Dutugemunu. But the reality of the argument for a unitary State is based on maintaining the dominance of Sinhala-Buddhists over the Sri Lankan polity.

This attitude is also politically blind in that it ignores developments over the past two centuries that have totally altered the population composition, the economy, society and culture of our land. These developments require a matching change in our political relationships and structures. This is what the proposals seek to achieve.

This then is the challenge before the Sinhalese community. Is it mature enough to realise the current realities, both within and outside the boundaries of the country, and to work towards a political structure that accords with those realities? It has now a chance to make these changes; if it does not, then we may well be faced with interminable war ending in Bosnian type of situation.

Let me now turn to the challenges facing the Tamil community. I traced earlier in this note the route by which disputes over political power grew to the point of an armed insurgency and the demand for a separate State. It is unarguable that it was the coercive power exerted by the Tamil armed groups in the first instance and specifically by the LTTE over the last ten years that moved the Sri Lankan State to a position where it is ready to change its very nature and to make a public offer of an effective devolution of power. The question that can

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The Ethnic Conflict and the Role of Journalists

Jehan Perera

Media Director, National Peace Council

The government's decision to exclude journalists from the LTTE ban will be welcomed by the media, and also by all who believe in the possibility of a negotiated end to the war. While the Sri Lankan media can be charged with not having lived upto its full peacemaking potential, sections of it comprise the most liberal and perceptive elements of Sri Lankan society.

The ability to see and report the different points of view is absolutely essential to the possibility of peacefully ending an increasingly desperate situation.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar statement on the issue implies that under the amended provisions of the law, journalists would have the right to actively seek out the LTTE and talk to them. There can be no peace in the country without talking to the LTTE. Journalists can pave the way, which the government can follow. Although not generally thought about in this manner, jour-

nalists are really conflict specialists, who spend much of their time describing and interpreting behaviors of individuals and groups in conflict.

Journalists can be compared to mediators in the following way. They both begin by analysing the conflict. They have to report the facts and get the facts accurately, while putting them into a context. Both journalists and mediators should restrain their inclination to take sides. They both can provide a forum for debate and exchange of views and give the parties in conflict a chance to air their views. They both can educate the parties to the conflict by challenging stereotypes and reframing issues. They both can also engage in monitoring by reporting adherence to, or breach of agreements.

Creative approaches by the broadcast and print media can assist the audience in understanding the reasons behind different perspectives held by the groups involved, thus helping the prospects for conflict

agreements and pacts designed to settle this problem. But the Tamils must weigh these doubts against the changed political conditions, the nature of the present government and even the credibility of the President. They must then decide whether taking the risk of entering into negotiations is more preferable than the unending miseries of war.

The LTTE has often said that it is prepared to consider a serious alternative to Eelam. It now has an alternative for discussion. It should therefore seriously consider whether negotiations are more likely to lead the realisation of Tamil political aspirations within a united Sri Lanka than the further application of force. It should take into account the fact that attitudes may harden in the south and lead to protracted war.

These then are the challenges facing both ethnic groups. And the future of Sri Lanka will depend on the maturity with which these challenges are faced. ●

resolution. Unfortunately, the mainstream media has been forced into an unhelpful role in reporting the Sri Lankan conflict. A part of the reason for this has been the government's media policy over the past couple of years that prevents journalists from going over into the conflict zones and reporting the situation at first hand. At present in Sri Lanka the situation is that all roads and means of transport to the conflict zones are blocked off by the armed forces who will not let persons through unless they have clearance. It is difficult for independent journalists to obtain that clearance.

SUPERFICIAL COVERAGE

In recent months, more journalists have gained access to the north-east. But this is generally to areas in which the government has established its control, such as Jaffna. On the other hand, journalists are only permitted to go into the conflict zones, such as the Wann, in a group. They are sent on whistle-stop visits for a few hours, where they do not have the time to really get to know what people are thinking and what the situation really is. What the media prints or broadcasts as news from the front are generally handouts of the Sri Lankan defence ministry. These will necessarily give a one sided picture of the prevailing situation.

It is ironic therefore that the average Sri Lankan television viewer is able to see live coverage of wars in other countries but not his or her own. It appears that the Sri Lankan defence authorities have learned the lesson of media control from the US-led censorship of the Gulf War. The United States learned from the Vietnam War how an independent media could catalyse opposition to war by highlighting the human costs. In the Gulf War, on the other hand, by carefully managing the news, and obtaining the concurrence of the major Western media organisations in this strategy, the US-led coalition was able to generate a very high level of public support for the war.

The same pattern can be discerned in Sri Lanka. Of course, there are some major differences. The Gulf War was over in a few days. So it was relatively easy to keep the media under control during that short period,

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be asked now, the question that could not have been asked before these proposals, is: Is coercion still necessary to realise their objectives or can they be better obtained through other means, specifically negotiations with the government?

This question is very important for the Tamil community. Political parties and groups claiming to represent the Tamils, with the sole exception of the LTTE, have generally accepted the proposals and are in negotiation with the government over the details of the proposals. The LTTE has virtually rejected the proposals and the path of negotiation.

I agree that there is a dilemma facing the Tamil community. What guarantee is there that these proposals will be fully implemented if the coercive power of the LTTE is either vanquished or withdrawn? This is a doubt that is fully justified when one takes into consideration the past history of

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and to feed the general population with sunshine stories by focussing on the hi-tech aspects of the war. But in the case of the Sri Lankan conflict, the war has been dragging on for over 15 years, and in the past two years it has been steadily escalating with no end in sight. It is therefore difficult for the defence authorities to continue to give sunshine stories, when the war is never ending, and when the level of army casualties is so high.

Besides, there is a counter-productive aspect to the government's media policy. It weakens one of the two prongs of the government's strategy with regard to its war against the LTTE. The effective news control on the war situation, and the human costs of the war, may serve to safeguard the military prong of the government's strategy. But it diminishes the appeal of the government's political reform prong. If people, for instance, knew of the human costs of the war, and the sufferings of the soldiers and civilians, and saw it in their bedrooms while watching television, they might be more inclined to accept the government's political package meant to satisfy Tamil aspirations for autonomy.

RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

The situation would be equally bad if not worse in rebel controlled territory, where information about developments in the outside world is virtually non-existent. The people in the Wanni, for instance, receive their information almost totally from the LTTE. It is not particularly surprising that a group of activists from the Wanni who visited Colombo believed that it was not possible to organise opposition to the war in the south. They are unaware of the change in the mood of the people in the south, which has enabled peace organisations to get together large numbers of people on a peace platform which calls for an immediate end to the war, and for unconditional negotiations between the government and LTTE with parity of dignity.

In Sri Lanka we are still far from this ideal of responsible reporting in which both sides of the picture are accurately depicted. In general, journalists identify themselves with the position of an ethnic group. So we have the Sinhalese-owned newspa-

Whither the Peace Process?

By Dr.S.Narapalasingam

Over the past few years, considerable discussions have taken place among politicians, political analysts and members of the public on the ongoing ethnic conflict and on the ways of resolving it with the aim of securing lasting peace in Sri Lanka. It is widely accepted that through military means alone the crisis cannot be resolved and a political solution, which is acceptable to all the ethnic groups is needed if Sri Lanka is to remain as one united country. The countries that split after a bitter war in which tens of thousands lost their lives and several billions worth of assets destroyed did not succeed in achieving the peace necessary for directing fully their efforts on fighting poverty, unemployment and social deprivations within their divided states. Indeed, failures on these fronts posed a great threat to internal peace and in many cases necessitated the diversion of their scarce resources for strengthening their security forces to thwart possible civil

disturbances. Thus a vicious circle of poverty, social unrest and high proportion of public spending on defence came to be established in many nations that split after a violent struggle.

A viable political solution and lasting peace are no doubt inseparable goals but the processes of achieving them are not identical. Nor are the time-frames for achieving them the same. The belief that there is only one common process for achieving both and that once the former is achieved the latter will automatically happen is not necessarily true. In the present article, an attempt is made to expose this misconception and explore ways to achieve the goals, taking into consideration the political realities and the developments that have led to the distrust of the minority communities in any unitary system of government that gives the overriding powers to the centre on matters affecting their safety, security, regional identity and general welfare.

The prospect of the proscribed LTTE accepting a political solution along the lines agreeable to all the main political parties representing the majority and minority communities is bleak as long as the LTTE is not willing to modify its goal of an independent state for the Tamils in the North-East. But many seem to believe that once the LTTE is weakened militarily, a political solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka that is acceptable to all the main political parties will compel the Tamil Tigers to give up their armed struggle.

In this postulate, there are two vital questions which must be considered. How far the LTTE should be weakened for its leadership to give up for good its demand for full independence? And whether the LTTE could be weakened militarily to this degree in the near future? Several deadlines set in the past to marginalise the LTTE militarily passed without any apparent impact on its military capabilities not only as a guerrilla movement but also as a conventional fighting force. The strategy to weaken its influence over the people

pers giving more prominence to hardline Sinhalese views and vice versa with the Tamil-owned newspapers. What then happens is that the readership of the newspaper gets only one-sided news which tends to whip up emotions and makes them believe that their side is right and reasonable and the other wrong and unreasonable.

Journalists who wish to contribute to being part of the solution to the conflict are placed in a difficult situation. They may wish to present balanced accounts of the issues that they are covering, especially after witnessing the realities in the north-east, but the management of their media organisations may not give them that freedom. In a small country like Sri Lanka, with jobs in the media field relatively limited, journalists will be naturally reluctant to go against the company line. Therefore, taking advantage of the government's special offer to journalists to enter into dialogue with the LTTE, would require a new openness on the part of the media companies. ●

in the North-East has not been purposefully pursued, despite the claim of the Government that this is what its aim is. This dereliction is unfortunate since there were no impediments for the Government to have taken suitable measures under the existing constitutional provisions. In terms of national costs and benefits evaluated in relation to the common goals of the main political parties, namely, achieving ethnic unity and peace, this strategy would have yielded high dividends relative to what have been achieved so far through the costly war to weaken the LTTE militarily.

Given the firm stand of the two main political parties in the Government and the opposition to keep Sri Lanka as one united country without giving any room that would endanger its territorial integrity at any future time, a negotiated permanent settlement with the LTTE, if it does not compromise on its stand on a separate state, is most unlikely. The fact that both sides have incurred enormous losses as a result of fighting for or defending their diverse positions is also a factor that has hardened their attitudes. In fact, this is also one of the many adverse consequences of the brutal war. For every combatant killed or disabled for life, there may be at least about 20 to 30 of his or her relatives and close friends who will be hostile to the side responsible for the act. It is believed that the main reason for young Tamil men and women to join the LTTE and especially become "Black Tigers" prepared to commit suicide, is their own personal experience of maltreatment or the brutal killing or torture of a close relative or friend by the security forces.

Another factor that should not be ignored here is that there is no external pressure to settle the conflict in Sri Lanka, as in the case of former Yugoslavia where the six-nation Contact Group comprising America, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy has played the main role in trying to bring peace to the Balkan region. These six Western powers with their mediation and threats ended the war in Bosnia. The Dayton accord itself would not have been possible by other means. President Slobodan Milosevic, who built his career on stirring up ethnic tension in the Serbian province of Kosovo was warned not to try a policing solution but to find a political

solution that gives greater autonomy for Kosovo through dialogue with the Albanian majority there. The contact group warned the federal government in Belgrade on March 9, 1998 (despite its insistence that the conflict was an internal matter) that a comprehensive arms embargo on Yugoslavia (presently comprising Serbia and Montenegro) would be imposed, unless it removes its special Serb forces from Kosovo and start negotiations with the Albanian leaders there. The new deadline of 4 weeks with further warning was given on March 25. It will be absurd for any one to expect a similar move in the case of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, as there is no pressing geo-political need for the Western powers to intervene.

Adjacent India, the acknowledged regional power is unlikely to get involved directly in settling the conflict again after its humiliating experience resulting from the heavy casualties (reportedly 1155 soldiers lost their lives and 2984 were severely injured) incurred during its "Peace Keeping" operations in North-East Sri Lanka and eventual withdrawal of the latter without completing its task. The Indian Government is reported to have spent over Rs.50 billion on their failed efforts in connection with the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. India also paid with the life of one of her Prime Ministers, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as a result of its involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict. Although any direct involvement by India in the ethnic crisis has been ruled out, it will be prudent to get India's endorsement and support for a final solution for geopolitical and other reasons.

Despite raised expectations among some expatriate Tamil circles, the BJP-led minority Government or any other government in New Delhi is unlikely to support the creation of a separate state for the Lankan Tamils. All major players there will favour a political solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, although the minor Tamil nationalist parties like the PMK and MDMK may provide emotive support to the demand for a separate state. This will not have any influence on India's stance on ensuring Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity.

The considerable international sympathy towards the Sri Lankan Tamils has been considerably eroded

in recent years particularly after the departure of the Indian forces. Their concern for the Tamils in Sri Lanka at the present time is limited to the prevention of violations of human rights, including the displacement of people from their habitats. The carrying out violent bomb attacks in which scores of civilians are wantonly killed and maimed and public property is destroyed has also attracted widespread international condemnation. There are the Tamil adventurists in safe havens, who are expressing the view that the Lankan Tamils have the might to defy world opinion and hence the war for separation should proceed until the declared goal of Tamil Eelam is achieved. They must be under the illusion that the vast majority of the Tamils despite all the losses they have suffered are in this warring mood risking their future for the sake of recording the heroism of Tamil warriors in modern history.

Peace Processes

The prospect of reaching a political solution at present seems to quite bleak. However, an effective political solution that has wide acceptance is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for lasting peace. In the present situation in Sri Lanka to have durable peace two peace processes are required. While achieving peace is an urgent process that may extend beyond the process of finding a political solution, keeping the peace is a continual process. With regard to the former, it will have to focus on reconciliation and the speedy implementation of confidence building measures. These should aim at repairing the damage and harm done in the past to inter-communal harmony. In fact, this will help to create a favourable atmosphere for reaching a political solution acceptable to the minorities. Any laxity with regard to the latter can render useless all the efforts made to achieve peace. Even under a reformed political system, sound policies alone by themselves cannot guarantee peace, unless these are vigorously implemented. Sincere efforts are needed to implement them for achieving and keeping the peace.

Had the process of peace keeping been taken seriously through the active implementation of crucial provisions in the constitution and ap-

proved policies, the demand for changing the unitary form of government would not have arisen. The perception among many members of the minority ethnic groups that governments have deliberately ignored the implementation of certain constitutional provisions and policies helpful to them has not changed. Mr. T.D.S.A. Dissanayake in his book, "War or Peace in Sri Lanka" (volume II) has given an example of such failures by pointing out that Tamil language as prescribed in the constitution has not yet been given its rightful place in the day-to-day functioning of the nation. According to the present constitution both Sinhala and Tamil are official languages, while English is the link language.

The vast majority of Tamils have yet to accept that the government of Sri Lanka is also their government and not solely that of the majority community. The many opportunities for the government to convince them that this is not the case have been missed by default. Moreover, the hostile method used by some security personnel to search for "terrorists" among the Tamil civilians has not helped to dispel this opinion. Importantly, the senseless way decrees issued under the Emergency Regulations and Prevention of Terrorism Act are applied does not help in ousting racial prejudice. It is not illogical to conclude that this helps the separatists and not in building a united nation.

The administrative system in Sri Lanka has also contributed significantly to the present crisis, mainly due to its politicisation by successive governments in order to make it serve the interest of the ruling party and their leaders and supporters. For the same reason, the police force has also been made an agent of the party in power. Incompetence, corruption and violations of established codes and conduct within the force as in the case of the rest of the public service have been overlooked because of this compulsion.

The era when the police force was considered by the people as the keepers of the peace and the upholders of the law is now history. It is widely known that politicians who wield power do bring influence to bear on the police and many police personnel look forward to this patronage for their

career advancement. There is enough evidence to acknowledge that for progress, prosperity and peace, the main prerequisites are the adherence to the rule of law and honest and efficient administration, regardless of whether or not the system of governance is fully democratic. Democracy has no meaning when the rule of law is blatantly violated by the elected representatives of the people, whose sacred duty, among others, is to uphold it.

If the administrative machinery is not improved to become more efficient, cost-effective and swift in serving all the people in accordance with the declared policies of governments, regardless of which party is in power, this will hurt not only the people but also in the end the popularity of governments. What is astonishing is that on many occasions when some terrible incidents happen that cause embarrassments to governments, bureaucratic red tape or lethargy is blamed and no meaningful action is taken thereafter to prevent such happenings in the future. Influential politicians, despite knowing the real causes of the ethnic and other national problems have shown little interest in removing them. Had there been less talk and more deeds consistent with the declared good intentions of party leaders, Sri Lanka would not have been driven to the present predicament.

The ethnic conflict has overshadowed the dangerous division that has emerged over the years, which eventually will be a formidable threat to peace in Sri Lanka. This is the gulf between the ruling class and the subjects, the millions of the powerless people, whose ambitions are very modest compared with those of the rich aspiring to become richer. The reluctance of the main political parties with their enormous lust for power to join forces so as to get rid of all the biased, anti-social and immoral practices in the administration can be attributed to their common desire to continue the revengeful and confrontational politics, despite their awareness of the terrible harm that will be done to the country and to the advancement of the poor people. Seminars and writings on the lessons of past mistakes of Lankan leaders have so far not had any effect on changing the attitudes of their successors.

Without a radical change away from the partisan and confrontational politics originating from the macho culture towards more responsible and consultative politics, there is little hope for peace and a better future for the vast majority of Sri Lankans, regardless of their ethnic origin. The ability of the opposition to obstruct the government from doing any noble deed has been enhanced by the PR system of selecting the MPs. If the main role of the opposition remains as the obstruction of the government in its efforts to resolve the burning issues affecting the people, then the present PR system helps in playing this role very effectively. After the first (Soulbury) constitution, the task of drafting constitutions has been the prerogative of the party or parties in power. They had the required two-thirds majority in Parliament to adopt their own drafts. The many obnoxious provisions in the second (1978) Republican constitution were motivated by the desire of the ruling party and its leaders to remain and continue in power and keep their political opponents at bay. The aspirations of the minority Tamils were also ignored in the drafting exercise. The consequences of these shortcomings are at the heart of the present political crises - confrontational politics and the unresolved ethnic problem.

Moving Forward

The holding of local government elections in January this year has revived hope among many Tamils in the areas brought under government's control that a civilian administration would address their day-to-day problems. If for lack of funds and other support from the Government the elected bodies are unable to discharge their public duties even within the limited powers assigned to them then the people's hope will be dashed again. Priority at the present time must obviously be on rehabilitation and reconstruction works and the restoration of the supply of essential services.

The Swedish government has allocated Rs. 188 million this year for rehabilitation work in Jaffna Peninsula. Other aid donors have also pledged financial support for such activities. It is important that the local administration in the area functions actively to facilitate the execu-

tion of projects even by international agencies operating in Sri Lanka. Without an effective civilian administration, this would be virtually an impossible task. Since the people will back wholeheartedly programmes and projects that are designed to provide immediate relief, they will punish any saboteurs. As explained above, there are no short cuts here and the effective way to start the peace process is through the vigorous implementation of urgent projects and policies that will first restore trust in the efforts of the Government to unite the divided people. If the Government pursues this approach vigorously, while not abandoning its efforts to reach a political solution people will be convinced that lasting peace is not a dream but a reality. At the same time the political and other obstructionists of its peace efforts will be censured by the people.

A major objective of the Sudu Nelum Movement, which has 146 branches throughout the country is said to be to educate the people, particularly the youths on the imperative to remove the deep rooted mistrust existing between different communities and bring them closer for living in harmony. The task of educating the people along this line cannot succeed in the context of the confrontational politics seen now, unless it is carried out under the collective guidance of civic leaders from all the communities, whose integrity has not been tainted in any way. The Civil Rights Movement, the National Peace Council and other organisations committed to peace and justice, must become a single mass movement to compel the political leaders to take the measures to build trust between communities and to agree on the reforms to the present constitution that will help in achieving the peace goal.

The objectives of the Sudu Nelum Movement and the various projects envisaged for implementation are unquestionably praiseworthy, but unfortunately the ambitious movement has fallen victim to the politics of confrontation because of the patronage of the Government. The positive contribution that the Government can make towards realising this noble objective is to facilitate the co-operative efforts of independent peace, civil rights and social activist movements without getting directly involved in

IDENTIFYING THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

Jayadeva Uyangoda

A defining characteristic of the present stage of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is the extreme determination displayed by both parties in seeking a decisive breakthrough on the military front. In terms of the commitment to war and intensity of the military activity demonstrated by the state as well as by the LTTE, there is hardly another parallel anywhere in the world at the moment. Their determination is such that, unless a miracle happens, the war is likely to continue for some years to come.

Against such a backdrop, a solution guaranteeing the minimum conditions for peace and reconstruction would require the successful working out of the following two measures:

(i) Termination of the present war between the state and the LTTE through an agreement between them.

(ii) A political agreement on the nature of ethnicity-based power sharing and its satisfactory implementation.

However, given the present nature of the conflict, achieving these two goals would be exceedingly difficult. The post-April 1995 phase of the conflict has been characterised by an unrelenting propensity to escalate violence. Violence has not only bred further violence; it has also reinforced the belief, equally shared by both parties to the conflict, that a decisive outcome in the battlefield, making the adversary's military capabilities ineffective, might have a direct bearing on the inner political logic of the conflict settlement process. Maintaining

the operations. As a demonstration of good faith, Government should refrain from converting into law the controversial bill passed recently, that allows it to do precisely this under the pretext of "proven" fraud. Transparency and accountability can be ensured under existing rules and regulations applicable to all registered organisations. In the above approach, any group seeking power through popular support will not try to stall the peace process. ●

a purity in offensive capabilities, gaining control of new or lost territory and inflicting on the adversary maximum possible human and material losses have thus become immediate strategic objectives of both the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. There is no evidence presently available to suggest that the two parties have reached, or are even likely to enter in the period ahead, a stage of 'hurting stalemate', however much the present stage of the war may have hurt the parties themselves as well as the civilian communities.

Understandably, the implications of such a reading of the Sri Lankan conflict are quite devastating. On the other hand, a false optimism on the capacity of the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE to arrive at a mutually acceptable compromise would also be equally calamitous. In discussions on the conflict in Sri Lanka, particularly among peace constituencies, specific peculiarities are seldom acknowledged. One would be that the conflict has moved far from the causes that originally produced it; rather, it is the consequences that carry the conflict forward. The consequences of the fourteen year war have been so overwhelming that some influential forces in both Sinhala and Tamil Polities appear to believe that the continuation of the war would be less of an evil than a settlement. The fear of a settlement-compromise seen as both evil and politically immoral - felt by direct as well as indirect parties to the conflict has thus become an active psychological factor in Sri Lanka's crisis. And this to some extent defines the typicality as well as the intractability of the Sri Lankan crisis.

Impediments to a Settlement

Armed conflicts are usually not settled with ease, and ethnic conflicts within a nation-state are particularly predisposed to lasting over a long period. This is because contemporary ethnic conflicts are not settled through ethnic solutions alone; rather, their solutions are inexorably linked to how the distribution of state power

would be re-organised. A solution to an ethnic question like the one in Sri Lanka would invariably presuppose that the state enters a new phase in its formation and evolution. Unlike in revolutionary conflicts, any solution in Sri Lanka, if it is to be worked out rationally, has to be a compromise concerning state power, and not a winner-takes-all situation because the conflict does not seem to end in victory for one party and capitulation of the other.

Overcoming impediments to a settlement is the greatest challenge confronting advocates of a negotiated peace in Sri Lanka. Negotiating peace between the state and the Tamil nationalist rebels appears to be as difficult and unrealistic as visualising the least feasible of the scenarios: negotiated separation. It is perhaps a peculiar case where peace may never be achieved by means of a negotiated compromise, unless the conditions for continuous reproduction of war are effectively managed. The paradox here is the absence of a force powerful enough to prevail on the two parties to change the conditions that makes the war rational, necessary and morally justified. Therefore, however bitter and unpleasant it may seem, it needs to be recognised that, at this historical moment, a thick pall of darkness has settled on the crisis. This darkness is not the making of this or that individual; it is a structural darkness, born of the historical moment. Looking at this darkness stoically, we ought to think that history does not unfold itself in the gloom alone; as Hannah Arendt would have said, it is in the darkness that a little flicker of light can survive and shine brighter.

First, then, about the momentary darkness. Concerning the nature of the political settlement, there has been no dialogue whatsoever between the two sides, although 'talks' have been held even as recently as 1994-1995. Governments in Colombo have from time to time developed their own political proposals and the system of Regional Councils proposed by the PA Government is the latest and the most far reaching of them all. However, the political process has so far been a one-sided affair, with no responses or proposals emanating from the LTTE, whose publicly stated position has been that an alternative to a separate state would be consid-

ered and indeed they have placed the burden of formulating such an alternative on the Colombo government.

There is no certainty that the political package prepared by the PA government would meet the LTTE's own criteria for an acceptable settlement. A probable LTTE response is likely to be based on three issues that the LTTE might find unacceptable:

(i) The Package lays down a system of enhanced devolution, equally applicable to all provinces in Sri Lanka. This does not recognise the specificity of the ethnic issue and therefore does not meet the legitimate political aspirations of the Tamil people. Based on the 'Thimpu principles', the LTTE's own framework formula posits that a solution should ensure the status of Tamils as a separate nation. This notion of separate nationhood, translated into constitutional principles, would require greater political and administrative powers guaranteed to the Tamil region as compared to those granted to Sinhalese regions. The notion of asymmetrical devolution/federalism might approximate to the likely position of the LTTE.

(ii) The solution proposed in the Package to the difficult issue of the unit of devolution in the North-East provinces amounts to the rejection of a position strongly held by all Tamil nationalist parties. It has been a consistent demand by militant as well as parliamentary Tamil parties that the Northern and Eastern provinces, as they are administratively constituted at present, should be merged on a permanent basis as a Tamil linguistic unit. The government proposals envisage the setting up of a political unit for the Muslim population in the Eastern province as well as the excising of the Sinhala majority Ampara district from the Eastern province. It is highly unlikely that the LTTE would abandon its long-held position on the non-negotiability of the issue of North-East merger.

(iii) Being an elaborate constitutional document, with detailed enumeration of powers to be exercised by the proposed Regional Councils and of relations between the centre and the regions, the Package leaves virtually no room for the LTTE to make its own inputs. The LTTE will have all the reasons to argue that the Package is a unilateral proposal worked out in every detail by the government.

From the psychological perspective of a nationalist guerilla organisation, the LTTE may very well be reluctant to accept a solution formulated in detail by the 'enemy'. Nationalist guerrillas usually prefer winning a settlement through direct action (negotiations, pressure, manipulation, threats etc) to merely accepting one in the designing of which they have had no say at all.

The Military Dimension

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has repeatedly demonstrated one peculiar characteristic throughout the past fourteen years: the sheer capacity of the war for intense re-escalation. Although it may have appeared on some occasions that the parties would reconsider the continuation of a military course of action, such 'intervals' have been followed by wars greater in scale, intensity and human cost. It is not incorrect to conclude that the military process has assumed a considerable measure of autonomy from the political process. The two sides have also demonstrated a distinct resilience even in the face of substantial military reverses in both human and material terms. At least in the military sense, the conflict does not seem to have yet reached a stage of exhaustion, although the political process appears to be running the risk of reaching such a stage.

The termination, or at least the de-escalation of such an intense military conflict, characterised by its enormous capacity to reproduce itself is the most challenging goal of conflict settlement in Sri Lanka. Past experience has been that temporary cessations of hostilities have been effective to a limited extent, yet they have been fundamentally fragile. Once hostilities resumed, there ensues a total breakdown of communication between the two parties; this has been the regular pattern. In such instances, the parties, despite the political rhetoric of returning to talks, have consistently accorded primacy to a military course of action in shaping the political process.

Challenges for the Political Process

As noted earlier, Sri Lanka's conflict is at a stage where both parties await the outcome of the military campaign before taking tangible steps

towards political negotiations. During the early stages of the conflict, the position shared by both sides was to negotiate from a position of military strength. What this effectively meant was that each party viewed any commitment to negotiations as an admission of its own military weakness. The position of military strength also meant in quite simple terms one party's ability to deliver a crushing military blow on the other so that the adversary would not have any option but to compromise at the negotiation table. But this scenario has not worked at all, because both parties suffered, yet withstood, serious military setbacks. Given the capacity of the two sides to recover quickly from setbacks on the battle front, it is difficult to envisage a situation where one party would gain a decisive military victory over the other in a manner that could propel the political process over the military option.

Assuming that ground conditions might change in favour of political negotiations, the question that needs to be immediately addressed concerns the basic framework of a settlement which could provide a positive start-

ing point for the two sides to work jointly towards a common ground. As things stand today, this would not be an easy exercise, precisely because of the mutually exclusive political outcomes to which the two sides presently appear to be committed. For the LTTE, a negotiated settlement would be unacceptable unless it results in a confederation arrangement, encompassing the present Northern and Eastern provinces; the devolution of power in other provinces would not be their concern. In a confederation-type settlement, the LTTE is likely to insist on a separate legislature for the North-East so that their national ideal of politically autonomous Tamil nationhood could be concretised. It is extremely difficult to envisage a situation where a Colombo Government could agree to such a proposal. - neither would such a settlement be acceptable to most of the Sinhalese community. A Colombo government could perhaps agree to a confederation arrangement only at the risk of greater political instability in the South, and perhaps of its own downfall.

A solution acceptable to Tamil na-

ionalist forces may not necessarily be acceptable to Sinhala nationalist forces and the Sinhalese masses in general. This constitutes the profound dilemma which peace-seekers in Sri Lanka will have to confront. This dilemma also represents yet another dimension of the intractability of the Sri Lankan crisis. Conflict resolution and peace-making through compromise in situations of heightened ethnic conflict within a nation-state are infinitely more complex and more difficult of resolution than class-based political conflicts or inter-state conflicts. Class-based conflicts for state power, especially when they have a socialist ideological base, can have a greater potential for compromise, because power-sharing along class lines is less likely to generate passionate resistance from classes that exercise political power. Or else, for class-based political movements, it is acutely difficult, in the contemporary historical circumstances, to sustain an armed struggle without confronting the dilemma of self-destruction at the hands of the state, unless the latter is a positively rotten entity. The Sri Lankan experience of



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the Janatha Vimukthi Peramauna (JVP - People's Liberation Front) of 1971 and 1987-89 illustrates the self-destructive possibility of class-based insurgent movements while the experience of NDLF of El Salvador demonstrates the compromising potential of more socialist-oriented rebellions.

This is perhaps the opportune moment to discuss some of the complexities of compromise-making involving minority nationalist insurgencies within the nation-state, as demonstrated in the Sri Lankan case. Extreme nationalists, both minoritarian and majoritarian, are hardly prepared for compromise. The reason is obvious. The immediate political goal of extreme minoritarian nationalists is usually defined in maximalist terms a separate state, as in the case of the LTTE in Sri Lanka - and this typically evokes extreme and passionate resistance from majoritarian nationalists. Maximalist minority nationalism provokes extreme responses from the state as well, because no ruling class can tolerate the dismemberment of the state which it governs. This makes compromise doubly difficult, because the compromise has to be made at two levels, among nationalists of the two sides and between two projects of state power.

Incomplete Shift Towards a Compromise

Developments since 1987, meanwhile, point to some movement towards compromise, although no lasting outcome has yet set in. This change has occurred at three levels. Firstly, with Tamil nationalism experiencing a significant transition from within, a number of Tamil militant groups have begun to re-define the political goal of Tamil nationalism in federalist terms, thereby retreating from the original position of a separate state. This has left the LTTE as the sole Tamil nationalist force to advocate and struggle towards separate sovereignty. But the significance of this change need not be overstated, because of the hegemony that the LTTE commands over the politics of Sri Lankan Tamils, living in Sri Lanka as well as abroad. The second is the space opened up within the Sri Lankan state for political and constitutional reforms, moving away from the unitary state model. While India's political and diplomatic intervention in Sri

Lanka 1987 compelled the Sinhalese ruling class - or least a section of it - to accommodate Tamil political demands by reforming the political structures in an idiom of devolution of power, the state has consistently demonstrated a definite capacity for further political reforms. The fact that this capacity is restrained by the political dynamics of Sinhalese society is discussed elsewhere in this paper. Third is the shift of international public opinion in favour of a negotiated compromise. The international community is extremely unlikely to support, even morally, the setting up of a new state in Sri Lanka; their continuously repeated position is that the government and the LTTE should work towards a negotiated settlement.

The thoroughly negative consequences of the LTTE's outmoded strategy of totally relying on military means in conducting polities have further reduced the space for an approach of equidistance on the part of the international community. This factor and the government's readiness to consider further reform has actually won for it the support and sympathy of international opinion. The implications can perhaps be contradictory: international coercion and isolation might compel the LTTE to seek a compromise; or else in the face of international coercion and isolation, the LTTE might totally reject any compromise.

International Mediation: Feasibility and Problems

Calling for a mediated settlement in an armed conflict, in its pure form, is a cry of desperation. But, a call for mediation can have implications other than a desire for conflict settlement. Since conflict resolution models rarely work in real life in their purest form, a conflict party might want to change the course of the conflict in its favour by calling for, for example, international mediation. Establishing of, or winning back, international legitimacy can very well be the political goal of such a call. Recovering lost ground in the battlefield, through a temporary respite, can be another short term objective of a mediation move. Undermining the legitimacy of the opponent's propaganda - for example, party A might have portrayed party B as stridently opposed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict - can also

be on the list of short-term political objectives of a mediation call. Incidentally, all these three 'theoretical' possibilities have been present in the Sri Lankan context.

It is therefore absolutely essential for anyone committed to peace-making to make a clear distinction between (i) mediation, (ii) calls for mediation; and (ii) mediated settlement. Mediation per se is not likely to result in a peace-making settlement, if parties to the conflict do not have the will to work towards genuine conflict resolution. Mediation, if it does not lead to a settlement, is always liable to be manipulated and abused, and it may even re-escalate the dimensions of the conflict. A fundamental precaution which any one advocating mediation should learn, at least in the light of the Sri Lankan conflict, is that the parties to the conflict operate on a highly self-centric matrix of morality. They are not babies who can be persuaded by moralistic preaching of elders or lay priests: they are hard-hearted and calculating bargainers. For them, mediation is not an idealistic option; nor is it a morally binding precept. The reason is quite simple: at the heart of Sri Lanka's conflict is the question of state power. This simple fact makes mediation an infinitely complex exercise.

Mediation and the Common Ground

Mediation, as a strategy of conflict resolution, is grounded on a fundamentally important assumption; the eventual desire of conflicting parties to accommodate and accept a common ground worked out by a third party. It is a strategic fallacy to believe that a mediator can take the conflicting parties by hand to a common ground, carved out by the mediator herself. The mediator can perhaps push the parties to a common ground, only if the parties have the desire and political commitment to seek a common ground. That pre-supposes a significant change of the dynamics of the conflict as well as a deep-seated political realisation that a common ground is a political necessity. This is one meaning of Zartman's concept of 'conflict ripeness', a situation where 'unilateral solutions are blocked and joint solutions become conceivable. 'The ripeness realisation may' also emanate from a realistic political assessment of global, regional,

country situations that makes settlement historically feasible.

A common ground among adversaries, after a period of intense conflict based on mutually-unacceptable goals, would also mean a decisive retreat from the 'original position'. This retreat from the original position is one that can rarely be imposed from outside. If the retreat is to be meaningful, lasting and credible, it has to come along with a rational choice of compromise. A common ground among adversaries, by definition, is a rational choice of compromise. The commonness in a common ground emanates from a realisation of at least the need to work with the enemy in seeking a mutually acceptable and of course new outcome, fundamentally different from the outcome associated with the original position. Seeking a common ground, as Simha Flapan once said in the context of Israeli-PLO peace prospects, is 'recognition of the enemy as a potential ally.'

Mediation is a Process

There is a belief, often expressed by believers of mediation in the Sri Lankan conflict, that third party mediation can quickly and dramatically bring the conflict to an end. One can sympathise with this belief while recognising its thoroughly idealistic underpinnings. Mediation is not a surgical intervention, as it may be in the case of a decisive military intervention. Rather it is a stage in conflict transformation. The notion of 'conflict ripeness' to some extent implies this essential dimension of conflict transformation. The notion of conflict ripeness presupposes that the conflict may not be resolved by the subjective wishes of its victims or on-lookers; for resolution, a conflict should have already produced the dynamics of its transformation. It is in the presence of such transformative dynamics that mediation can find productive space.

A question that needs to be asked at this stage is: why should a mediator get herself involved in bringing to an end a seemingly hopeless conflict like the one in Sri Lanka? What are the mediator's motives in conflict resolution? Would a mediator have the resolve, determination and will to suffer setbacks, frustrations and disappointments in the face of an indeterminate, arduous and difficult

process of bringing the two conflicting parties together?

Many advocates of mediation in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict appear to believe that outside, third party mediators have an altruistic motive in bringing this conflict to an end. This altruistic model in the Sri Lankan context has competing expectations, as articulated from time to time by the LTTE and the government. The LTTE's belief appears to be that the international community has a moral obligation to enable the Sri Lankan Tamil community to achieve the status of nationhood. Therefore, the commitment of an international mediator should emanate from a political commitment to the right of self-determination of an oppressed nation. The government, meanwhile, appears to believe that since it has made an honest attempt at meeting Tamil political aspirations, the international community should mediate in the conflict in order to make the LTTE accept that political offer.

These are expectations that have little actual relevance to conflict mediation in Sri Lanka. It is highly unlikely that altruistic, or even purely humanitarian, motives would compel the international community to mediate in Sri Lanka. If altruism is a compelling motive, the Bosnian conflict would not have been as painfully protracted as it was. Conflict mediation, in the final analysis, is conflict intervention. Therefore, economic or geo-political interests would provide a stronger basis for a mediator to intervene with long term commitment and with an awareness of the risks involved. Is Sri Lanka a site attractive enough for a 'peace rush' among international mediators, as presently believed in some quarters'?

When mediation is talked about as a strategy of resolving internal armed conflicts, it is usually assumed that the mediator should be (i) an outsider; and (ii) an influential state. Occasionally, the notion of a grouping of states, SAARC or the Commonwealth, has also figured in the discussion. Meanwhile, quite a number of countries have also offered their services to play a mediatory role in the Sri Lankan conflict. However, the identification and selection of the mediator can be a complex issue, given the possibility of one party to the conflict perceiving the mediator as

partial to the adversary, or even liable to be influenced by the adversary. A clear case of this nature occurred in 1995 when the Sri Lankan government had made arrangements to obtain the services of a French mediator, at a time when the talks between the government and the LTTE were reaching a crisis point. Quite apart from the question of timing involved in that mediatory effort, the LTTE objected to that particular mediator on the ground that he was partial towards the government. The point the LTTE raised would interest students of mediation: when a mediator is selected, the selection process should involve both parties to the conflict. And indeed, when the process of mediator-selection leaves room for objections, there is also the likelihood of a party to the conflict using that incomplete process as an excuse to withdraw from negotiations.

There is yet another meaning of the collectiveness of the mediation process. Chris Mitchell has recently drawn attention to the difficulties associated with the role of a single intermediary actor in complex conflict situations. Mitchell suggests that "such a complex process might be more effective if it were contributed to by a number of intermediary parties rather than carried out by a single entity." In this 'mediation-as-process' model, mediation is treated as a complex exercise to which "many entities might contribute, simultaneously or consecutively, rather than as the behaviour of a single, intermediary actor."

In the Sri Lankan context, the single-mediator model may face a somewhat unique problem. If the mediator is a particular country such as USA, UK, Australia, Canada, or Norway, Sinhalese nationalist forces are likely to oppose such a selection on the ground that these countries have a hidden agenda to favour the LTTE or Tamils in the negotiation process and in the outcome. The fact that many Tamil expatriates live in these countries where the LTTE has also been quite active has made Sinhala nationalists quite suspicious of their mediation motives.

To return to Mitchell's mediation-as-process model, it recognises different functional stages that can fruitfully be looked after by a number of mediators. Mitchell has identified thir-

teen roles for mediators in a complex conflict situation. They are explorer, convener, disengager, unifier, ens-killer, envisioner, guarantor, facilitator, legitimiser, enhancer, monitor, enforcer, and reconciler. The functions implied in these roles need not to be compartmentalised, or performed by thirteen different mediatory actors. In practice, there can be collapsing of two or more of the functions in this inventory of roles. The important point, though, is that a consortium of mediators might provide greater opportunities for conflict de-escalation in Sri Lanka than the involvement of a single mediator.

Reflections on the Political Culture

Now it is time to turn to another theme, "the salience of political culture." No political culture would evolve, or shape itself, in isolation from society's deeply felt crisis experiences. Since the early eighties, the every day experience in Sri Lanka has centred on violence, destruction, hatred and moral commitment to enmity. An overbearing sense of uncertainty and anxiety prevails in society which is translated into violence as well as fear of violence. Engulfed in so much violence, Sri Lanka is not a normal society; it is a shell-shocked society where reason and considered judgement in ethnic politics has given way to the politics of anxieties. When extremist positions of a few receive newspaper headlines and moderation is condemned or ridiculed, there is no reason to find other yardsticks to measure the degree to which the basics of the democratic political culture are incapacitated.

I have argued in this paper that in Sri Lanka, reconstruction of the state, its structural alteration, is a paramount necessity for conflict settlement. In an ideal-typical situation, this would necessitate a futuristic political vision of an ethnically heterogeneous political association called the state, a vision that should be shared by the three main ethnic groups. Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Such a shared vision still remains a distant possibility. Perhaps, the idea of sharing political power, particularly among the ethnic groups, has been the least accepted, and of course the most resisted, approach in Sri Lankan politics. The resistance to sharing of state power has been emphatically seen as

a virtue among the elites and ethno-political cadres (Sinhalese as well as Tamil), and to a considerable extent among the masses too. The democratic political culture with which Sri Lanka has been so intimately associated, strangely enough, excludes power sharing on the principle of ethnicity. In this society, indigenisation and domestication of democratic institutions and practices has occurred in such a way that they are presupposed to serve exclusive sectional interests. This is the discursive *raison d'être* of majoritarian unitarism as well as minoritarian separatism.

One key problem with contemporary Sri Lanka is the absence of strong defences against ethnic exclusivity in politics. The post-colonial nation-state has destroyed all those defences in its own style. Re-building these defences invariably involves building of a new political culture that can accept and yet transcend ethnicity in politics. But, there is a massive problem: there is no political ideology historically capable of providing such

a vision. At least in Sri Lanka's case, there have been only two ideological strands that were capable of providing conceptual underpinnings for a non-ethnicised political order, Marxism and liberal humanism. With the historical decline of Marxism as well as liberal humanism, Sri Lanka's problem has become infinitely complex. We don't have theoretical categories to envision the future politics. And in this historical predicament, Sri Lankans can find solace in the fact that they are not alone.

The realisation of this predicament will hopefully lead us to our next task; imagining new forms of political association to replace the present historical form of the nation-state. This, nothing less, is the real task of re-construction.

To conclude in one sentence, let us re-imagine the Sri Lankan state before reforming or reconstructing it. This task, one may emphasise, remains totally outside the will and capacity of the parties involved in the present conflict. ●

NEW BJP REGIME AND ITS IMPACT ON TAMIL NATIONALIST CAMPAIGN

By D B S Jeyaraj

The installation of the right wing Hindu Nationalist Bharatheeya Janatha Party in the governmental seat of power in New Delhi has predictably evoked a mixed response in neighbouring Sri Lanka. Taking note of the fact that LTTE friendly political parties are aligned with the BJP Tiger propagandists have hailed the new government optimistically and asserted that a change in Indian Policy towards the Sri Lankan Tamil issue in general and the LTTE in particular is inevitable. In a bid to counter this viewpoint and allay Sinhala fears Sri Lankan foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has been the first foreign dignitary to visit New Delhi, meet with the BJP leaders and obtain assurances that there would be no tilt in favour of the Tigers. Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist ideologies are struggling to cope with this phenomenon where the secular credentials of the Indian State is in seri-

ous danger of becoming a theocracy very much on the lines of the foremost place given to Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The fact that for the first time in post Independence India a non-secular outfit and its appendages have been able to form a government that has at least for the time being stood the test of a confidence vote in the Lok Sabha has very serious implications for India and all her neighbours in the South Asian region. In the first place the development indicates that the BJP with its brand of Hindu Nationalist policies described as 'Hindutwa' has come to stay for the next two or three decades at least as a powerful political force in India. The party which had only two seats in 1985 has now got 178 seats and together with a motley group of pre and post polls allies cobbled together a fragile government. Even if this government does not last long it is clear that the

BJP is very much here to stay. In that context it is very likely that notwithstanding its protestations to the contrary the party will strive to implement its 'Hindutwa' agenda as far as possible in the future. Against this backdrop it is quite timely to examine the short and long term implications of the rise of the BJP for Sri Lanka.

As far as the short term implications are concerned the immediate question obviously is whether current Indian policy towards Sri Lanka particularly in the context of the Ethnic crisis will undergo drastic changes. The Indo-Lanka accord, the IPKF-LTTE conflict, the fall of the Indian installed EPRLF administration in North-East Sri Lanka, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in India, the advent of Chandrika Kumaratunga as Sri Lankan President, the collapse of peace talks and resumption of conflict in Sri Lanka, the promulgation of the Gujral Doctrine that espouses clear and definite non-involvement in neighbourhood internal politics etc are all factors that have affected Indo-Lanka relations.

Hands-off Policy

Gone are the mid-eighties when India deliberately adopted a sympathetic line towards the Sri Lankan Tamils and attempted to bring about a political settlement ensuring maximum devolution within a united Sri Lanka. Today India having burnt her fingers in her benevolently interventionist phase is seemingly adopting a hands off policy. India still stands for a political settlement of the conflict within a united Sri Lanka but will not involve herself in any activity in pursuit of that goal. India has not displayed in recent times any interest to act as facilitator or mediator in the Sri Lankan conflict.

Instead what has been happening in is a perceived Indian tilt against the LTTE in favour of the Colombo government. In this India is no different from various Western Nations that have also been adopting the same pro-government, anti-LTTE stand. This perspective evolved mainly as a result of the collapse of government-LTTE talks, the unilateral resumption of hostilities by the LTTE and the efforts of the Kumaratunga administration in trying to usher in a devolution package. In the case of India greater compulsions such as the defiance of

the LTTE in fighting the IPKF and the killing of Rajiv Gandhi on Indian soil have also played a part.

The end result is that India has banned the LTTE and is also helping on a low key basis the efforts of Colombo in countering it. Also Indian public opinion particularly in Tamil Nadu is no longer stridently supportive of the LTTE. The recent harsh verdict of the death penalty being imposed on 26 accused in the Rajiv murder trial for example did not provoke a major outcry in the state despite the severity of the sentence. Adding to the complications is the fact that the LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran has been proclaimed as a wanted man by an Indian Tribunal.

Again an unfortunate corollary of this has been the virtual disinterest of India towards the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The articulation of the Tamil point of view through LTTE discourse and the perceiving of the same by a Tiger prism has created this situation. Although the fundamental and legitimate aspirations of the Sri Lankan Tamils are yet to be realised and the consequences imposed by the on-going war continues to increase their grievances their plight is yet to receive adequate cognisance. The inability to distinguish between "Tamil" and 'Tiger' issues has led to this situation. In the aftermath of Rajiv's death and the significance of the Sonia factor no Congress led or supported Indian government has evinced any real interest in the Tamil problem. Thus the BJP government assuming office has certainly led to speculation at least that a shift in Indian policy may take place.

Expecting Change of Policy

From an LTTE viewpoint there are seemingly valid reasons for expecting such a change. These expectations have been expressed in LTTE controlled media outlets abroad. These hopes are based on three premises. The first is that LTTE friendly parties like the Marumalarchy Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) of Vaiko, Pattaligal Makkal Katchi (PMK) of Dr Ramadoss, The Samatha Party of George Fernandes, and the Shiv Sena of Bal Thackeray etc are part of the new government dependent on the support of allies. Vaiko has named his first grandson Prabhakaran. Ramadoss has time and

again declared his support for the LTTE and dared the Indian government to arrest him. Fernandes defied an order by the Indian Home minister last year and staged a convention expressing solidarity with the Eelam Tamils at his Delhi residence. Thackeray has the Tiger as his emblem and publicly stated his admiration for Prabhakaran in glowing terms.

The second is that the ALL India Anna Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) led by Jayalalitha Jayaram with 18 seats is the second largest party in the combine. Furthermore Jayalalitha has the nine seats of her allies too at her disposal. This enhances her bargaining power with the BJP and she has already demonstrated that she is capable of extracting her pound of flesh. Although the AIADMK has been viewed as anti-LTTE recent initiatives undertaken by people like Nedumaran and Veeramani seem to have converted the AIADMK leader. There is now a possibility that Jayalalitha may have changed her attitude towards it. If so she with her bargaining clout could pressurise the BJP into taking a favourable line towards the LTTE seems to be the LTTE hope.

The third premise is that a new dispensation professing a Hindu nationalist ideology is in the New Delhi saddle for the first time. Although the LTTE follows a secular form of Tamil nationalism it would not be averse to its supporters within and without Sri Lanka to play the "Hindu Tamil" card. The past years have seen the Tamil problem being perceived only as an ethno-linguistic issue. This has necessarily confined support for the Tamil cause in India to Tamil Nadu and Tamilians alone. But exploiting the Tamil Hindu factor at a time when a Hindu nationalist force is in power is a new approach. Utilising the fact that the majority of Tamils in Sri Lanka are Hindu or that the majority of Hindus are Tamil and seeking to project it as "Hindu suffering" is a tactic, the political potential of which is yet to be realised in India. Besides the LTTE too has a hobson's choice as neither the Congress, nor the left parties would consort with it.

In this situation the LTTE oriented hope seems to be that there would be a perceptible shift in Indian policy. Overtly it would hope for India to suspend its military assistance to Sri Lanka. For instance the Indian Navy

has captured two LTTE ships and helped the Sri Lankan Navy destroy another arms ship. It would like India to revoke the ban on it or at least let it lapse quietly without renewing it. The LTTE would also like a climate to be created where its supporters in Tamil Nadu could function actively and openly in espousing political support. Covertly it would like a situation where the Tigers could use Tamil Nadu clandestinely as a procurement source of food, medicine, fuel and equipment.

It is fear of such a possibility however remote it may be that has impelled Foreign Minister Kadirgamar to undertake a swift visit to New Delhi. He was the first special envoy from a foreign country to visit New Delhi after the new government took office. Kadirgamar met with Premier Vajpayee, Home Minister Advani, Power Minister from Tamil Nadu Kumaramangalam, Former Prime Minister Gujral, Congress Chief, Sonia Gandhi and former Central Government minister for Industries Murasoli Maran of the DMK. A significant act of omission was not meeting with George Fernandes the minister of defence and acknowledged partisan of the LTTE.

Indian Assurances

As a result of these meetings Kadirgamar was able to obtain assurances that the BJP government would not support violence or separatism in Sri Lanka. Reiterating an election manifesto pledge Vajpayee stated that the BJP stood for the political accommodation of the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils in within the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. These bland assurances are quite consistent with India's public position on Sri Lanka. Even at a time when India was training and arming Tamil militants on Indian soil the public position of New Delhi was that refugees were being looked after. Also even if the BJP had a hidden and hostile agenda towards Sri Lanka that party was not going to explicitly admit that. In that context the wide publicity given in the State media to the promises elicited by Kadirgamar suggest that the intention of the visit was to allay Sinhala paranoia and gain internal political mileage rather than achieve anything significant with India.

The BJP that has cobbled together a flimsy majority is now concerned with political survival. It is not likely to make any decisive policy shifts in the realm of foreign policy until it settles in as comfortably as possible. Any premature deviation from this stance can only be necessitated by urgent political pressure exerted by its Tamil Nadu allies. Those parties like the AIADMK, PMK and MDMK have not moved in that direction so far. They too seem more concerned with obtaining a share of the political spoils rather than agitate on behalf of the LTTE. Despite the wishful thinking of LTTE sympathisers certain factors that circumscribe any positive Indian tilt in its favour are also worthy of consideration.

First and foremost the current reality of the Indian, particularly the Tamil Nadu situation has to be taken into account. Unlike the eighties the Sri Lankan Tamil issue is not a vote gathering issue. It has become a non-issue. Any party like that of Nedumaran's that harps on the LTTE is likely to be rejected by voters. Vaiko of MDMK and Ramadoss of PMK realised the disadvantages of plugging a pro-LTTE line and pointedly refrained from touching on Sri Lanka during the election campaign. Under these circumstances there is no political compulsion on any of these parties to exert any urgent pressure on the BJP to act speedily on behalf of the LTTE.

Secondly even if the pro-LTTE elements succeed in getting the BJP to take steps in favour of the LTTE other countervailing factors would militate against it. Whatever position taken by LTTE supporters there is no denying the fact that an Indian tribunal has held the LTTE as being guilty of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has been indicted in absentia as being primarily involved in the assassination conspiracy and has been proclaimed as a wanted man. Given the fact that Sonia Gandhi nursing a grudge against the LTTE account of this is now at the helm of the Congress and that the party continues to be a force in Indian politics there would always be a public outcry against any BJP move to support the LTTE overtly or covertly. This opposition spearheaded by a Sonia led Congress would act as a constraint

on the BJP in helping the LTTE.

Public Opinion

Furthermore Indian public opinion will not allow such a change. Although some sections in Tamil Nadu are still pro-LTTE the bulk of those sections are in essence from the 'powerless' strata in terms of caste and class. This is very evident among influential opinion makers. On the Other hand a substantial segment of the 'Powerful' Indians in terms of caste and class are vehemently opposed to the LTTE. Almost all top people among the media are bitterly estranged from the Tigers. As such one can easily predict that any efforts by the BJP in the direction of the LTTE will be heavily criticised and squashed by these elements.

In addition to this there is the Indian bureaucracy particularly those sections of the South Block who determine foreign relations. These officials have their own idea of what is good for India. Given the past history of dealing with the LTTE they are still opposed to renewing contact with the Tigers again. Governments may come and go but generally the input provided by these sections maintain a continuity of policy. This is more evident when a weak interdependent government takes over at the centre. The BJP is one of that kind. Besides Vajpayee himself did not rock the boat when Foreign minister under Morarji Desai from 1977 to 80. It is he who is foreign minister now.

Another factor that may dampen Tiger supporter enthusiasm is the emergence of anti-LTTE personalities from Tamil Nadu within BJP government folds. There is the irrepressible Subramaniam Swamy who has already raised the issue of George Fernandes being unsuitable for the Defence Minister post because of his LTTE affiliations. Tiger baiter Valappady Ramamurthy is a Cabinet minister. He is a Rajiv loyalist whose party is named Tamil Nadu Rajiv Congress. Ranganathan Kumaramangalam the BJP cabinet minister from Tamil Nadu too was a Rajiv loyalist when in the Congress. Already he has gone on record in a meeting with Kadirgamar that there was absolutely no chance of a realignment with the LTTE. So any moves by the pro-LTTE faction will be definitely countered by these anti-LTTE elements.

It must also be noted that while the anti-LTTE sections are vociferously articulate about their hostility towards the Tigers those pro-LTTE sections are maintaining a deafening silence. This again indicates that there is very little chance of conflict breaking out openly between pro and anti LTTE elements on this issue. Even if that does happen those supporting the LTTE would be necessarily defensive and are therefore likely to be overwhelmed by those against the Tigers.

The only decisive factor that could be beneficial to the Tigers is the dynamic and determined Jayalalitha herself. If she decided to throw in her lot with the LTTE openly and exerts pressure on their behalf then there is a strong possibility of a change in the scenario. If she pushes then the BJP too will be constrained to fall in line. The anti-LTTE elements too may reluctantly toe her line or at least not oppose it. But whatever the efforts of Nedumaran she does not seem interested in that option at least for now. Her immediate priority seems to be that of getting out of her legal tangles and also getting the DMK

government dismissed. There does not seem visible any immediate political benefit to her that would impel her to actively support the LTTE now. Also she may not like to burn her bridges completely with Sonia's Congress. She can increase her leverage with the BJP by demonstrating that she can always strike a deal with the Congress if and when necessary.

Prospect of Reappraisal

In such a scenario there does not seem to be any possibility in the short term that there would be a major policy shift in India in favour of the LTTE. The BJP government is likely to go along with its predecessors on this at least for the time being. The quality of support extended to Colombo on this score may drop. But there are no prospects right now for the LTTE to be the beneficiary of a drastic about-turn by India. This however will not deter Tamils regardless of being LTTE supporters or not looking up to New Delhi for relief and succour. If this trend continues however there is a possibility of a reappraisal of India's overall policy towards Sri Lanka in the long term under Bharatheeya Janatha

Party rule. If this materialises in concrete form then there could be new developments. The most important of these could be the transformation of Tamil nationalism from that of being ethno linguistic to that of being ethno religious.

A noteworthy aspect of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism has been the virtual absence or non-presence of a religious component. Unlike the role of Buddhism in Sinhala nationalist consciousness Tamil nationalism of the post Independence era has been essentially non-religious and secular. The religious revival movements of Anagarika Dharmapala and Arumuga Navalar in the pre-Independent period did not strike a parallel course after Independence. Tamil nationalism in the early years of Independence was basically responding and reacting to Sinhala nationalism. That it has over the passage of time assumed virulent proportions that blur distinctions between the oppressed and oppressor is another matter. But unlike 'Sinhala Buddhism' Tamil nationalism was never dominantly "Hindu Tamil". Having a committed Christian SJV Chelvanayagam as its chief pro-



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ponent from 1947 to 1977 the course of Tamil nationalism was clearly charted along non-religious secular lines.

This Tamil nationalist tradition continued even after armed Tamil militancy took over the nationalist struggle. Instead of a religious dimension most of the movements used revolutionary leftist rhetoric in their discourse. Even the ultra nationalist LTTE continued with the non-religious nationalist tradition after becoming the dominant Tamil entity due to a variety of reasons. Before the unfortunate developments of 1990 the LTTE had cadres from the Hindu, Christian and Islamic faiths in their fold. Even after the Muslims were estranged and expelled, the Christian component both Protestant and Catholic increased in the LTTE.

Relatively progressive sections of the Christian clergy have identified themselves with the Tamil struggle. Some continue to do so. Others have paid the supreme price. A few have been incarcerated too in the past. Later as the oppressive conditions imposed on the fishing communities of Tamil coastal areas increased a large number of youths from these areas joined the LTTE in large numbers. The greater part of these sections were Catholic. There is also a significantly large proportion of Christians among expatriate supporters of the LTTE. Adding to this was the secular outlook of many LTTE leaders including Prabakharan despite being a devout Hindu in private.

Secular Tradition

Thus the LTTE due to subjective and objective conditions continued to espouse the Tamil secular nationalist tradition. A little known story is about how some Tamil Nadu BJP members were rebuffed by Prabakharan in the mid-eighties. The BJP delegation had requested Prabakharan to change the emphasis of the struggle from that of an ethnic based one into that of a religious based one. Projecting the struggle on Tamil ethnic lines alone would restrict support from India to Indian Tamils alone. If, however, it was projected as a Hindu struggle support could be mobilised in the rest of India including North India, it was pointed out. The BJP also said that they would begin publicising the sufferings of the Hindus by

spotlighting the destruction of temples in the War.

Prabakharan politely turned them down. He stressed that the nature and history of the Tamil struggle was ethno nationalistic and not religious. Apart from Hindu temples Christian churches too were being damaged. This was because these were seen as 'Tamil' places of worship and not Hindu or Christian. The LTTE itself had a very strong Christian component among its cadres and supporters. If the Tigers changed the focus to that of the Hindu religion then these sections would be disillusioned. Dissension would set in and the movement would be weakened. Also the LTTE vision of Tamil Eelam was that of a secular state. As a parting shot Prabakharan pointed out that his only Son was named Charles Anthony in memory of his best friend and trusted Lieutenant from Trincomalee who happened to be a Roman Catholic. Thereafter the Tamil Nadu BJP has remained aloof from the LTTE.

Despite this past, current developments indicate that the rise of the Hindu Nationalist BJP in India is having a demonstrative effect on the Tamils of Sri Lanka who are preponderantly Hindu. Having suffered so much in recent times the beleaguered Tamils are of a frame of mind that hopes for relief from any quarter. In that context India has always been a source of hope in spite of recent political developments. With the BJP emerging as a governmental alternative many Tamil Hindus are naturally hoping for succour on grounds of religious affinity. Even Christian Tamils would not mind this as long as Indian intervention ensures a peaceful settlement.

All this time the Tamil struggle has never been viewed in religious terms. Now a new line of thought has begun to grow. This tendency is bound to flourish in the future. The emphasis would be on appealing to the Hindu sentiments and hoping for solidarity on a religious basis. The bulk of the Tamils in Sri Lanka are Hindus or in another way the majority of Hindus in Sri Lanka are Tamils. Therefore the political struggle here can be projected in religious terms. This would in the long run transform the scope and content of Tamil nationalism from the secular into that of a Hindu Na-

tionalist one. The fact that the support potential of 'Hindu' India has never been tapped on those lines could make this proposition attractive to even secular nationalists. The Indian government being Hindu Nationalist would encourage this development.

Sign of Change

The signs of this future trend are quite visible. A north-east based association has sent a memorandum with details about nearly a thousand Hindu temples being damaged over the past years in this war. Colombo based Hindu associations have met with the Indian High Commissioner and related their woes. Petitions and appeals have been sent to the new BJP government outlining the problems faced by Tamils including that of arbitrary detention of Hindu brahmin priests and their family members. Many Hindu organisations have quickly sent congratulatory messages to the BJP government. The Sri Lankan chapter of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has in its message deliberately highlighted the fact that 99% of the Hindus in Sri Lanka are Tamil. This trend of identifying on a Hindu basis is likely to increase with the passage of time.

It is an indisputable fact that the Tamils of Sri Lanka are being subject to severe hardship due to the conflict. Despite the professed sincerity of Chandrika Kumaratunga the reality is that Tamil aspirations are yet to be fulfilled. On the Other hand Tamil grievances are mounting quantitatively and qualitatively on a daily basis. The inhuman arrests, detention and interrogation of thousands of Tamils in Colombo only on the basis that they are Tamils is but one nefarious example. In this situation like drowning persons clutching even at straws the Indian BJP Hindu option is eagerly welcomed.

Secondly the Tamil Nadu situation too has changed. The form of Tamil nationalism articulated through the Dravidian ideology has waned. The Non-brahmin caste vote bank is fragmented. Karunanidhi and the DMK have let the Sri Lankan Tamil cause down badly. A newly emerging reality in Tamil Nadu is the evolution of a Hindu consciousness that is eclipsing the dravidian ethos. The BJP has come to stay. At least now

some Tamil parties having some interest in the Sri Lankan Tamils are tied up with it as opposed to the DMK that has completely abandoned the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka. So in one way the Tamils of Sri Lanka have no valid Indian option other than to woo the BJP through playing the Hindu card.

The long term implications if the secular credentials of the Tamil struggle were to change on religious lines which might bring about its fragmentation. Likewise India too faces dangers of a different sort when dissension emerges as a result of 'Hindutwa'. But few have such a perspective. It is the present and now that matters. So this religious trend is likely to become larger and more intense in scope in the years to come. Tamil nationalism would be transformed.

The LTTE may not actively encourage this at the start. But it will not oppose it either. It could covertly promote it as a tactic. Depending upon its utility value it could adopt this as a comprehensive strategy in the future. If this were to become a reality, the question is whether the present support that the LTTE receives from the Catholic and Christian sections among the Tamils would continue or not.

If and when this happens the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka would face new insecurities. The earlier majority-minority complex of the Sinhalese seeing themselves as a minority of fifteen million against a Tamil majority of sixty million in the South Asian region would be aggravated once the secular nature of India dissolves into that of a stridently Hindu nationalist one and Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism transforms into Hindu nationalism then Sinhala fears would increase. In the new religious environment the Sinhala Buddhists would be a smaller minority against seven hundred and fifty-five million Hindus. The irony is that the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists who are determined to convert Sri Lanka into a Buddhist theocracy have no moral right to criticise the BJP enterprise of 'Hindutwa'.

The real danger in the long term to the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka is the potential rise and growth of a 'unification' movement on both sides of the Palk straits on the basis of 'Hindutwa'. The Indian elite has al-

FIGHTING SHY NUCLEAR BOMBS AND DEFENSIVE MISSILES

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

The BJP is one Indian political party which never minces its words, rightly or wrongly. A number of generals and colonels and majors who had rejoined the party a few weeks before the polls were looking forward to this loud declaration. The BJP, after getting the chance to lead the new government at the centre, managed to get its new defence minister George Fernandes, the once-Gandhian and left-socialist peace-monger, to assert that that "We shall not fight shy of inducting the nuclear option if there is a need for it". By speaking out, which is his forte, George was doing a double, subtle act: firstly, he was adhering to the BJP's stated position in its election manifesto and the national agenda set by the BJP and its pre-, post- and now-post-post electoral allies; secondly, he was repudiating his own legacy of stiff opposition to the existence of all forms of nuclear weapons in the sub-continent.

It takes enormous guts to take such a stand. And George, the hero, took that stand way back in 1974 when he wrote a pamphlet against the doublespeak of Indira Gandhi who took pride in announcing the first Indian peaceful nuclear explosion which took place in the desert sands of Rajasthan. George, who was then leading an incredible railway strike against Mrs Gandhi's government, was able to ridicule her language of nuclear peace which had invoked none-other-than Buddha. The code for the suc-

cessful outcome of the explosion went thus: "The Buddha has smiled". The enlightened smile of the Tatagata was being used to legitimise the terror and threat of nuclear explosion, pointed out a wry-smiling George, who was to spend the horrific months of Mrs Gandhi's Emergency in underground and in jails.

But the Fernandes of 1998 is a changed man altogether, though he dresses and smiles and gets energised the same way. There are social and political causes still dear to his heart, but he has come a long way. After all, nine years ago, he had been a minister along with Dr Raja Ramanna, the father of India's very-peaceful nuclear explosion-cum-Advaitic Vedantin-cum-piano virtuosos, in the National Front government led by Mr V P Singh.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the bomb was the abhorrent symbol of the evil side of Western civilisation. Auschwitz and Hiroshima had confirmed the Mahatma's apocalyptic vision of the direction of Western polity. For George, who never tires of publishing excerpts from Gandhi, the bomb is no longer abhorrent; he confesses that he is just shy talking about the bomb and he'd like not to fight shy of talking and having the bomb. One step ahead, it is evident that the shyness is not with the likes of Fernandes, but with the bomb itself. Yes, the bomb was earlier peaceful, now it is just shy; shy enough not to caress or rub the wrong side of the United States which plays equidistant with India and Pakistan.

India's shy bombs might well be the nice answer for Pakistan's latest quiet-and-peaceful Ghauri missiles. Yes, Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif Mian, while delivering a lecture at the National Defence College on April 6, went on to announce the successful test-firing of the Hatf-V or Ghauri surface-to-surface missile, with a range of 1,500 km and payload of 700 kilos. According to Pakistan, the test-firing was peaceful, because it was only a defensive act in the wake of the new Indian government's national agenda of not fighting shy of nuclear weapons.

ways been against Sri Lankan Tamil separatism because it could trigger of similar tendencies in Tamil Nadu. The religious dimension however will change all that. If the Sri Lankan conflict continues to drag on then the danger of Hindu nationalism assuming transnational proportions could become a reality. The only effective check to this would be the speedy resolution of the current conflict. But, that alas seems to be a never ending one. Thus the rise of the BJP seems very likely to transform the Tamil nationalist struggle in Sri Lanka in the years to come. ●

Well, the Indian media was confused. Was the test done entirely on Pakistani soil? Of course, the news was that the missile rose to a distance of 350 km before hitting its target 1,100 km away. But did the test take place after an air-sea-alert? There was no way of knowing that. Fernandes and prime minister Atal Vajpayee discounted any threat from the Ghauri, but Fernandes hinted that the Pakistani missile programme would have had some help from China. According to Fernandes, China was the mother of this missile. Chinese missiles placed in Tibet have been targetting India for decades, he recalled. Well, bombs and missiles hitherto had fathers, now it's the contribution of this great socialist to emphasise the motherliness of those who make them. Well, if those who make bombs and missiles are motherly, the weapons themselves can't be far behind. This explains why Fernandes went on to state that India's Prithvi and Agni missiles would "take care" of the security interest angle. Such motherly weapons indeed.

Fathers and mothers will have to give way to the child. That is nature's way. The latest child of the BJP-led government is the National Security Council, as stated expressly in the national agenda. Yeah, the Indian NSC - the mirror image body of its Pakistani, and possibly US', counterparts - is being born. The NSC will undertake India's first-ever strategic defence review and a Task Force has been set up by Vajpayee himself for working out the constitution, role and function of the NSC.. The Task Force has three members - former defence minister K C Pant who switched over to the BJP from the Congress(I) a few weeks before the elections, BJP leader Jaswant Singh, a former army man and a Vajpayee confidante and Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, director of the Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses who'll also act as convener of the Task Force. The Task Force will not fight shy of submitting its report soon and the NSC will have a peaceful and nice birth within a month, well before the outlays for defence expenditure in the Indian budget are to be hiked substantially, never to be brought down again.

Well, the poor of India and Pakistan, shall have poorer roads, schools

MUSLIMS, FRIENDLESS IN TAMIL NADU?

T N Gopalan

"The philosophy of Islam suits most probably all people of the world If Islam is a superior religion it should take over the whole Indian people, it should destroy all obstacles to achieve it..." -Periyar EVR in August 1931.

On a tip-off a police party reached the spot, thoroughly searched the baggage of the 40-member group, all of them women, and also interrogated them. It turned out they were all Haj-bound pilgrims from neighbouring Kerala. The world has turned upside down indeed for the Muslims in Tamil Nadu, constituting around six per cent of the total population. Every Muslim, man or woman, is a suspect these days, and no tears are shed if they are indiscriminately arrested and harassed. Only no one is, as yet, suggesting openly, that they all be repatriated to Pakistan. That is some mercy perhaps.

But the fact remains that the recent series of blasts and murders, thanks to a shocking rise in the Islamic fundamentalist activities, have alienated the entire Muslim population from the Hindu mainstream.

No doubt the Muslims have always maintained a separate identity. Unlike the Christians and other minorities, they have stubbornly refused to be integrated into the mainstream or be self-effacing. And their world view being much more egalitarian than that of the Hindus', they have attracted the Dalits into their fold in large numbers and always been viewed with a mixture of awe and apprehension. But never have things reached such a sorry state as today where they are almost totally friendless, and where any kind of complaint of human rights violation is lost in the rising din of the demand for strong action against the terrorists.

It is not perhaps all that an uncanny coincidence that anti-Muslim feelings should start running high in the Dravidian land at a time when the Jayalalitha phenomenon is wreaking havoc on the Tamil society.

While Jayalalitha as the head of an avowedly Dravidian party is a resounding repudiation of the Dravidian move-

and hospitals and perhaps no new employment chances at all, but can afford to dream of play gadgets like nice shy bombs and peaceful mis-

ment, all that it is supposed to stand for, the alienation of the Muslims from the essentially non-Brahmin Tamil society is a body blow to the Dravidian movement which has always boasted of its special relationship with the minorities, the Muslims especially.

"The period 1925-35 (which saw the first wave of conversions to Islam by the lower caste Hindus) incidentally coincides with the period when the Self-Respect movement, which was itself founded in 1925, was indulging in its virulent campaign. These conversions were made possible to a great extent by the constant exhortations of the Self-Respect movement to embrace Islam... the increasing activity and mobilisation of the Muslim proselytising association Isha-at-ul-Islam started in December 1929, might also have been prompted largely by the Self-Respect movement's campaign.. the leaders spoke in public meetings not only against Brahmins, Hindu gods and the caste system, but also about the grandeur of Islam and the necessity for untouchables to convert to Islam and to obtain equality and liberty." That is from J B More's "The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamil Nadu and Madras (1930-47)."

The identity of the Muslims with the movement was so complete at one stage, during the initial days that is, that the Muslim leaders could blithely badmouth the Hindu gods and customs from the Self Respect platforms.

In fact such perverseness could be said to have led to a Hindu communal backlash in the state. That is a different story though. The point is that in this land of Periyar EVR the Muslims are viewed with suspicion, if not outright hostility.

The unrestrained police zoolom on the Muslims of Coimbatore in December last year in which more than 20 persons were either shot dead, burnt alive or butchered to death in a most gruesome fashion, and properties worth crores were looted and destroyed was perhaps a watershed in the Hindu-Muslim relationship in the state. What struck this correspondent most when he visited the textile city in western Tamil Nadu was that there was not a single Hindu soul among those interviewed to shed a tear for the badly affected muslims.

It was a terrifying attack never before seen in Tamil Nadu history. At one stage the Karunanidhi government found it unable to control the rioting policemen and had to bring in the army.

But at the end of it all it was shocking to find the typical man on the street implicitly justifying the carnage. "Well whatever happened to the innocent among the Muslims is perhaps regrettable. But then they all asked for it. You cannot allow organisations like the Al Ummah to get away with it all. They have been holding the local police to ransom by their violent means, intimidating them with deadly weapons. Well, If the Muslims cannot rein in their own boys, they will have to face the music." Then there were blasts in trains on 6 December, on the fifth anniversary of the Babri masjid demolition and the more horrendous, multiple explosions on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections to coincide with the visit of the BJP president L K Advani, leading to further hardening of the Hindu sentiments and perhaps the debacle of the DMK-TMC front too.

As has been observed earlier in these columns the Islamic fundamentalists have been striking terror in the minds of the rest of the society for some years now, executing a series of assassinations of some key Sangh Parivaar functionaries and

activists besides the bomb explosions killing mainly uninvolved civilians. Well after the state police launched a severe crackdown, in the aftermath of the March blasts, a Hindu Munnani professor was hacked to death in Madurai. The police has been monotonously unearthing huge cache of explosives, more than 300 kg of them in the state capital itself and hundreds of Muslim youths have been rounded up. There is actually a general state of panic, unclaimed baggage sending out alarms and any unfamiliar Muslim man or woman being suspected of worst possible designs in any locality.

A matter of greater concern is that none of the score of youth cadres of the Al Ummah feel any remorse about what they have done and were planning to do before the police closed in on them. "Perhaps the innocent Hindus suffered a lot in the Kovai blasts... but what can we do? You don't expect us to keep quiet without wreaking revenge for the atrocities committed against us by the police," they say audaciously to the waiting presspersons when they are brought to the courts for remand extension.

And their leader, the dreaded S A Basha, screams out abuses and even threatens the magistrates right inside the court halls with dire consequences if he and his men are not released on bail forth-

with. Well he or his disciples do not get the bail sought, on the other hand they manage to leave a bad taste in the mouth of the judiciary besides making the people at large even angrier over their antics.

It is in such circumstances Jaya-lalitha is in hysterics over the deteriorating law and order and is pressing the Vajpayee government to forthwith dismiss the DMK regime. "They had sought to destroy Tamil Nadu by encouraging the Tigers in 1989-91 and now through the Islamic fundamentalists," she says with evident relish.

After some initial hesitation Karunanidhi has swung into action and has directed his administration to root out the Islamic fundamentalists by all means, at all costs. Even the pro-BJP north Indian English newspapers concede that Karunanidhi is doing his best to restore law and order.

For his part Prime Minister Vajpayee has declared time and again that he would not invoke Article 356 of the Constitution and dismiss the DMK government, making the lady profoundly unhappy.

The dismissal might or might not come. Everybody though is on tenterhooks, not knowing where and when the terrorists will strike next. Another serial blasts on the Coimbatore scale, the DMK

(continued on next page)



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EMS: HISTORY AS SUBJECT OR SUBJECT AS HISTORY?

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Very few failed to realise that EMS Namboodiripad, the Marxist veteran of South Asia, had kept his date with history: on the very day the BJP-led coalition government was administered oath of office in Delhi, he had breathed his last at a private hospital in distant Trivandrum, having written his daily quota of articles for Desabhimani, the Malayalam Marxist paper which he had founded six decades ago by selling his ancestral and feudal property in Malabar region.

That was EMS, probably the tallest of Marxist leaders of India. Most Marxists never tire of stressing the point that it is history and circumstances which make Man. At least in the case of EMS, this is not true: happily so, since it was he who made history possible. Elankulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad led a quintessentially rebellious youth life in an orthodox Namboodiri Brahmin family. And he died at a ripe old age of 90 while preparing for the next round of battle against the Bharatiya Janata Party, that complete perversion of In-

dian philosophy and culture.

I must mention my first contact was with EMS way back in 1976. As an impetuous teenager, I had distributed, among collegemates, audio cassettes containing speeches of the late Jayaprakash Narayan and EMS against the Emergency of Mrs Indira Gandhi. It was a pleasure to go back to the pages of history to learn that both JP and EMS had been part of the Congress Socialist Party which functioned as the left vanguard within the Congress in the 1930s. The experience of Emergency left me wondering how EMS could evade arrest even as his compatriots like A K Gopalan were swiftly put into jail. Later, I learnt that EMS used a combination of strategies to keep alive a public debate against the Emergency in Kerala and the CPI chief minister Achuta Menon would not arrest him!

My second encounter with EMS was personal, having taken place in Bangalore in the mid-eighties when I was introduced as an extremist intellectual to him by a Jawaharlal Nehru University professor. EMS never spoke in a condescending tone to a young hothead like me, took an immediate liking in finding out what I read and write and never failed to ask me this same question whenever he came down to Madras during the next decade. He was curious to find out why structuralism and post-modernism would attract someone like me who had an abiding interest, like him, in Advaita Vedanta! He too was an Advaitin, but in his words, his life was a descent from the world of Gods and Demons to that of real human beings. And I retorted that the world of Gods and Demons was still significant to millions in the subcontinent!

Our quiet banter continued till the CPI(M) conference at Madras in 1992 when he relinquished the post of party general secretary. During these years, he used to tell me that my drift away

from Marxism would soon be complete. But it was I who found him at the receiving end at the time of the dramatic collapse of the Eastern bloc and later, the Soviet Union. These and other shocks were simply powerless against the strength of his Marxist convictions, as I was soon to find myself beside him in the interpretation of the BJP-Sangh Parivar's terrible demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. It is true that we were way apart in interpreting Marxism, but were together in grasping the significance of such an act like the Masjid demolition and the consequent rise of the BJP.

Kunju, as the EMS the child was called in Elamkulam, once wept when the hut of an untouchable was demolished to make way for a road to his tharavad (ancestral house) in Perinthalamana taluk of Malappuram district. Having lost his father in an early age, young Kunju was given rigorous training at home in Sanskrit and later Malayalam, Hindi and English. Kunju managed to convince his mother that he has to go to a nearby school which fully opened him out to other castes and communities. At the school, he got closer to the legendary V T and M B Bhattathiripads and launched a journal, Unninamboothiri, against the feudal system "to make human beings out of the Namboodiris". As a teenager, he occupied positions in the Yogakshema Sabha and campaigned for liberating Namboodiri women from oppressive rituals. For all his endeavours including taking the initiative for the first widow re-marriage of the community in 1931, the Namboodiris got him ostracised. EMS must have got amused when some left extremist leaders started accusing him of being Brahminical in the late seventies and eighties!

As a student of history in Trichur, Sankaran was clearly drawn by Mahatma Gandhi and he left the college. His professor lamented that his best student had left but had an inkling of what Sankaran was to become when he said "Sankaran will make history". Having joined the Congress, Sankaran came under the fold of Jawaharlal Nehru, who, thirty years later as prime minister, was to dismiss the first elected communist government in the world led by none other than

(Continued from page 28)

will have lost all its moral right to continue in office. As a human rights activist observed in disgust the other day, "One wonders whether a la Prabhakaran these fundamentalists are going all out to destabilise a friendly regime, what a hostile Jaya back in power in order to effectively widen the communal divide with all the disastrous consequences that such a course could entail. Already some of them are telling their Muslim brethren, "We told you that the Hindu administration, even the Hindu people in general, will be fair to us. Let us fight for our rights courageously. Otherwise we will be wiped out..."

These are times when the Hindu-tva plank, backed as it is by a fawning media, is gaining ever wider acceptance. The foolhardy, misguided Muslim boys and girls (yes, one finds some women activists too these days) play into the hands of the Hindu communalists. ●

EMS of Kerala!

Sankaran had met P Krishna Pillai and other socialist leaders in various jails and this led to a leftwing criticism of Gandhi's strategies and tactics vis-a-vis feudalism. Along with Acharya Narendra Deva, JP and A K Gopalan, EMS went on to found the Congress Socialist Party in 1936 advocating a left line within the Congress during those heady years. Sankaran's understanding of land relations in south Asia came to the fore in 1939, when he, as a legislator, wrote a dissenting note, rather a thesis, in favour of tenancy rights. This very understanding led him to declare, as chief minister of Kerala in 1958, that the state police would not interfere in the resolution of land disputes in favour of tenants. This was one of the reasons for his government getting dismissed by Jawaharlal Nehru.

Sankaran was forced to spend the few years during the second world war in underground as the British became suspicious of the communists and decided to come down hard on them. While some communists resurfaced by going along with the anti-fascist line and suspended the anti-colonial stir, EMS could not do so as the British government was still suspicious of him. This was a turning point in his life, as he completely gave up the last of the Namboodiri vestiges, namely his food habits. Living with ordinary farmers and fishermen, he ate fish and meat and became part of their life. Somewhere in his writings, he describes himself as the adopted son of the working classes! The dawn of independence gave him no respite as the Congress government decided to ban the Communist

Party in the wake of the Telangana uprising and the thesis of insurrection put forth by the late B T Ranadive.

In 1957, EMS went on to lead the first elected communist government in the world, attracting international attention. This was a stupendous feat, given the fact that communists were then following the different path of insurrection in other places including Cuba. EMS rewrote the communist programme in India including in it participation in governance: an extremely innovative step. Quite aware as to what is possible and what is not under the given dispensation, EMS was willing to try, experiment and learn from the experience. The steps his government took in reshaping land reforms and education had shaken the entire edifice of the Kerala society and he was rewarded with dismissal! These steps laid the foundation for the policies to be followed by all the future governments in Kerala. The left activists were to play a great part in social reform as well as literacy and popular science movements of the seventies and eighties in Kerala.

The sixties witnessed a different period, with the left movement fissuring into three principal streams. EMS went along with the CPI(M) condemning the CPI's stand of supporting the Indian ruling classes in the Sino-Indian war. EMS' line of peaceful settlement of the border disputes with China and Pakistan earned him the wrath of the Indian establishment, especially the media. The later break propelled by the Naxalbaris was to bring further problems for EMS who was the first communist to have articulated participation in government. The extremist left wanted to bring

about immediate revolution and this had created problems for the CPI(M), especially in West Bengal and Kerala where it was part of the ruling fronts for a while.

As general secretary of the CPI(M) during 1977-92, EMS sought to practice a balancing act between governance and social change. This was reflected on the field at West Bengal, where the CPI(M) became the principal political party and entrenched itself in governance through radical land reforms. It was period of trial and consolidation for the communists and EMS' theoretical grasp of going for "inclusive alliances" of broad masses of people brought substantial results for the party which found itself supporting the government at the centre (led by V P Singh) from outside during 1989-91, just before EMS was to relinquish his post.

EMS was a keen historian and polemicist. Apart from pamphlets, EMS had written more than 75 books in Malayalam and 15 in English, mainly on the Indian independence struggle, Gandhi and Nehru, social history of India, especially Kerala and on literature. His writings on literature, however, occasionally brought protests from even left-leaning writers like O V Vijayan who saw in it attempts to subordinate art to ideology and defend the indefensible in communism: dictatorship and erasure of history. And with this the question can be posed whether EMS saw history as a proletarian or mass subject which would achieve the Marxist utopia or he, as a subject, constitutes a type of contemporary history of the subcontinent. The myth of the former is over, and probably, the latter is true.

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Tamil parents seek British educated professional person for their attractive daughter (British born), 27, educated and qualified in medical profession in UK. Send photo, full details. M 1011 c/o Tamil Times.

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Ph.D. Engineer, 33, 5'11", non-smoker, in good employment in London. Send details. M 1021 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek reasonably educated vegetarian bride for accountancy finalist son, 25. Send horoscope, details. M 1022 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek educated bride for British born son, 30, 6'2", computer graduate employed in bank. Send horoscope, details. M 1023 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent weddings.

Jegamuraleetharan son of Mr. A.V. Panchadcharam and late Mrs. Pooanam Panchadcharam of 'Jeganpavanam' Meesalai West, Meesalai, Jaffna and **Vijayamalar** daughter of the late Mr. Vaithilingam and Mrs. P. Vaithilingam of 'Vijayapavanam', Pungudutheevu 4, Jaffna on 28.3.98 at Highgate Murugan Temple, London N6 5BA.

Kirupanathan son of late Mr. Kanthapillay and Mrs. Kanthapillay of Neervely Centre, Neervely, Jaffna and **Bharathie** daughter of late Mr. S. Balasubramanier and Mrs. K. Balasubramanier of Uyarapulam, Anaicoddai, Jaffna on 30.3.98 at Harrow Teacher Centre, Wealdstone, Middx. UK.

Ganeshkumar son of late Mr. Kurnaratnam Nadarajah and Mrs. Yoganee Nadarajah of 1 Fountainhead Road, Apt 2014, North York, Ontario M3J 1K6, Canada and **Paheerathy** daughter of late Mr. Murugesu Thambiah and Mrs. Rajapoopathy Thambiah of 2

Hadden Way, Greenford, Middx., UB6 0DH on 1.4.98 at Rhodes Memorial Commonwealth Centre, Bishop Stortford, Herts.

Somasundaram son of Mr. and Mrs. Ayyakannu Desigar of Manipay, Jaffna and **Chithra** daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Satkunanathan of 9A Revell Road, Kingston, Surrey on 5.4.98 at The Guildford Civic Centre, Guildford, Surrey.

Sarvesvaran son of Dr. S. and Mrs. T. Navaratnam of 5 Windy Hill, Hutton, Brentwood, Essex CM13 2HP and **Vaani** daughter of Dr. S. and Mrs. R. Gnanalingham of 20 Wensley Drive, Withington, Manchester M20 3DD on 10.4.98 at Thurrock Civic Hall, Grays, Essex.

Rajeev son of Mahinda and Indra Malagoda of 96 Celeborn Street, South Woodham Ferrers, Essex CM3 7AF and **Saloni** daughter of Vinay and Bala Sharma of 2 Grove Road, Edgware, Middx., HA8 7NW on 12.4.98 at Bushey Golf and Country Club, High Street, Bushey, Herts.

OBITUARY



Mr. Arumugam Ponnampalam (Papa), beloved husband of the late Annammah; loving father of Mrs. Thavamalar Kulasingam (Canada), Thavapalasingam, Jeyaraj (both of UK), Mrs. P a t h m a m a l a r Sivapathasundram (Jaffna) and Rajasingam (UK); father-in-law of the late Kulasingam, Mrs. Vageswari Thavapalasingam, Mrs. Kaushalya Jeyaraj, the late Sivapathasundram and Mrs. Mangaiyarakasi Rajasingam; grandfa-

ther of Thavaraj, Pathmaraj, Kularaj, Sri Kanth, Angela, Manjula, Pravin, Pramila, Sivarooban, Tharshan and Navin; great-grandfather of Gobinath and Mangalanath passed away peacefully at the age of 98 on 31st March 1998 in Cheam, UK.

The funeral rites were performed at home on 6th April and the cremation took place at North-East Surrey Crematorium following a speech by Mr. N.S. Kandiah and a prayer by Mr. Sri Ranghan, both close friends of Papa for many years.

The members of the family wish to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 119 Mulgrave Road, Cheam, Sutton, Surrey SM2 6JU, UK. Tel: 0181 642 0870.

IN MEMORIAM



In cherished memory of Mr. Chinnathampy Rasiah on the fourth anniversary of his passing way on 24.04.94.

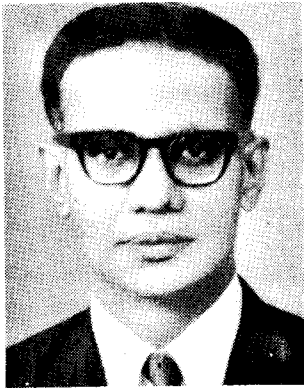
Deep in our hearts you will always stay
Loved and remembered every day.

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by his sorrowing wife Gunamany, beloved children Rajan and Rajini, loving daughter-in-law Janaki, son-in-law Lakshman, grandchildren Thabojan, Prashanth and Sulakshan, sister-in-law, nephews and nieces.

● 14 Greenbriar Avenue, Wheelers Hill, Melbourne, Vic. 3150, Australia.

● 3818 Campolindo Drive, Moraga, 94556 California, USA.

IN MEMORIAM Ctd



In everloving memory of Mr. Vellupillai Nadarajah, formerly Director, Ceylon School of Social Work; son of late Mr. & Mrs. Vellupillai of Chetty Street, Nallur, Sri Lanka; son-in-law of the late Mr. K. Muthulingam and Mrs. Muthulingam of Tellipallai, Sri Lanka on the seventh anniversary of his passing away on 4.4.91.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Muthu Ambikai; daughter-Dr. Sakunthala; son Dr. Ravindran; son-in-law Dr. Suresh Thayalan; daughter-in-law Meera; grandchildren Arjun, Nisha and Athiya. - 11 Baronia Croft, Highwoods, Colchester, Essex CO4 5EF.



In loving memory of Mr. Visvalingam Sivasubramaniam, Principal Emeritus Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam on the second anniversary of his passing away on 26.4.96.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Sironmany; children Dr. S i v a n a n d a r a j a h , Sivagnanasunderam, Dr. Sivapalan, Sivathanan, Sivaratnam, Sivamanoharan

and Sivaloshanadevi; son-in-law Thavarajah; daughters-in-law Manimehaladevi, Anandhi, Yogeswary, Kamaladevi, Supathiradevi and Devahi; grandchildren Sutharshan, Priyatharshini, Suseenthiran, Suhanthan, Sutharshika, Suloshan, Suthaharan, Sulakshan, Arooran, Gajamohana, Gajaharan and Vaishna. - 135A Sudbury Avenue, Wembley, Middx. HA0 6AW. Tel: 0181 385 0477.



In loving memory of Mrs. Grace Nagarathnam Rasiah of Varuththalai-Vilan and Ilavalai; beloved wife of the late Mr. M.A. Rasiah (Former Headmaster) on the First Anniversary of her passing away on 5th April 1997.

With fondest thoughts and prayers from her family - 40 Hillingdon Road, Kingswood, Watford, Herts. WD2 6JG.

In loving memory of our beloved



Amma Appa

Leelawathy Saravanamuttu Ilankanathan Ilankanathan
Born: 24.08.32 Born: 31.10.22
Rest: 28.04.96 Rest: 18.02.54

You are greatly missed forever
And are in the thoughts of
All your family and friends.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by your ever-loving daughter Umila, son-in-law Kuha, grand daughters Shobi and Ranji. - 58 Ringwood, South Bretton, Peterborough PE3 9SH. Tel: 01733 262760.

IN MEMORIAM

Pradeep Jeganathan
(Born: 01.12.64)
(Died: 31.03.97)



One year ago today
You were cruelly taken away.
Now there is only bitterness
Desperation and loneliness.
For us we bemoan your loss
It is hard to bear this cross.
Never a day begins or ends
Without a thought of you.
Hopes and dreams for you we had
All were shattered and left us sad.
Sweet memories of you none can steal
The pain in our hearts only God can heal.

Affectionately remembered and profoundly missed by his parents, sister, brothers, brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, niece, uncles, aunts and cousins.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- May 1 Sashdi.
- May 3 Feast of St. Philip & St. James.
- May 4 Feast of Martyrs of England & Wales.
- May 7 Ekathasi.
- May 8 Pirathosam; Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.
- May 11 Full Moon.
- May 13 Feast of Our Lady of the Fatima.
- May 14 Feast of St. Matthias.
- May 16 Feast of St. Brenden.
- May 18 Feast of St. John I.
- May 20 Feast of St. Bernadine.
- May 22 Ekathasi; Feast of St. Rita.
- May 23 Sanipirathosam.
- May 25 Amavasai; Karthigai.
- May 26 Feast of St. Philip Neri.
- May 27 Feast of St. Augustine.
- May 29 Sathurthi.
- May 31 Sashdi; Whit Sunday.
- June 7 Association of Sri Lankan Catholics in UK organises Feast of St. Anthony of Padua at Saints Michael & Martin's Catholic Church, 94 Bath Road, Hounslow, Middx. Holy Rosary at 2pm followed by concelebrated Holy Mass. Refreshments in Parish Hall. Tel: 0976 519 714.
- At the Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4608.
- May 3 6.00pm Karnatic Vocal by Laigudi Lalitha Krishan from India.
- May 28, 30 & 31 Lalitha Srinivasan of 'Nupura', Bangalore conducts Bharatanatyam workshop.
- May 31 6.00pm Bharatanatyam by Artistes of Nupura School, India, along with their Guru Lalitha Srinivasan.

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SCOT Makes Progress

The Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People (SCOT) has received feedback and newspaper reports regarding the implementation of several projects of relief and rehabilitation approved during the period September to November 1997.

The following were approved during the period December 1997 to February 1998

- Jaffna University Hospital Development fund: £ 1200 for the payment of allowances to medical students to undertake basic clinical work to ease work load due to shortage of staff.

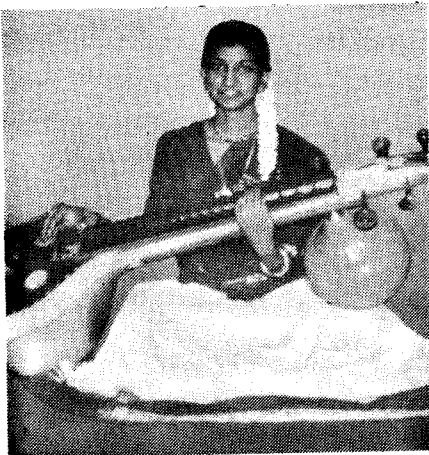
- University Scholarship Fund: £ 1000 to Batticaloa University and £ 2000 to Jaffna University. These amounts were donated by well-wishers and set up in memory of their loved ones to help disadvantaged students.

- Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, Jaffna Branch: £2500 to facilitate primary health care in Maruthankerny, Irupalai, Karanvai, Udupidy and Neervely, which are areas without access to any medical facility. This project is co-funded by the League of Friends of the University of Jaffna. (LOFUJ).

- Peoples' Welfare Organisation, Kopay: £800 to purchase sewing machines and typewriters to train youth in the respective skills to gain employment.

SCOT receives several more requests for very useful projects, finds its resources extremely limited and appeals for help. Those interested, please write to Project Officer, SCOT, 107 Coleman Court, Kimber Road, London SW18 4PB or telephone 0181 870 9897.

Amuthavanees Veena Arangetram



The Veena Arangetram of Amuthavanees, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Anpananthar of Shelly Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 and pupil of Guru Smt Rudrani Balakrishnan took place on 6th September 1997 at The Broadway Theatre, Barking,

Essex before a distinguished gathering of musicians and music lovers. The Chief Guest was Sangeetha Kalandhi Thanjai K.P. Sivanandam, former Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Annamalai University and the Guests of Honour were Innisai Venthan Thiru Pon Suntharalingam and Dr. V.G. Santhosam. The evening's events were compered by Mr. Wimal Sockanathan and the accompanying artistes were Sri Muthu Sivarajah on Miruthangam, Sri Arunsalam Gananathan on Ghatam and Sri Kandiah Sithamparanathan on Morsing.

The Chief Guest in his speech applauded Amuthavanees on her excellent rendering of all the swaras with great ease for nearly three hours without any hesitation or pause. He complimented her on what appeared to be a professional performance rather than an arangetram. He hoped that she would perform many more concerts in the future and become a Veena Vidushaki.

Chelvathamby Aruchuna - An Appreciation

Chelvathamby Aruchuna, who passed away in Colombo on February 16, 1998 at the age of seventy three hailed from Thambasitty, Puloly West, Point Pedro. He was a Public Officer attached to the Post and Telecommunication Department, Sri Lanka. At the time of his retirement in 1982, he was a Regional Administrative Officer in the Department.

Right through his working and retired life, Chelvathamby Aruchuna was humble and concerned about the dispossessed in society. He was not merely concerned, but has rendered valuable service for the betterment of the downtrodden and underprivileged. This is reflected in his activities during and after his public service.

During his public service he was a Trade Union activist and was President of the Postal Clerical Service Union. Through Trade Union activities he rendered valuable service towards the welfare of the dispossessed - the working class. After retirement, he returned to his native village of Thambasitty to re-establish the links with his roots. There again he continued his social service by humble ways and means.

The most notable and noble service he rendered towards the betterment of the dispossessed in Thambasitty was English Language tutoring. For several years he conducted English Language classes free of charge for the children of the village, who were mostly poor. He was fondly addressed as 'Aruchuna Appa' by the village folk, particularly children.

Amidst a number of fee levying tutorials round Point Pedro here was a person offering free tuition which was a gift to the children of the poor villagers. As an appreciation of his selfless service, some pupils offered him fees which he politely turned down. Some of them pleaded that at least

that he should accept a small sum as a token of their appreciation, but he continued to refuse material gratitude from his (mostly poor) pupils. He was the living testimony of a selfless social volunteer. His humbleness was further demonstrated by his shunning publicity.

Once his service as an English Language teacher was sought on a monthly remuneration which he refused and said, 'I have the moral satisfaction that I have tutored several pupils to obtain a credit pass in English Language in the G.C.E. O/L examination'. It was this moral satisfaction that he was after and not any material benefit or cheap publicity.

There were times when his noble attitude of selflessness conflicted with the interests of some of his near and dear ones. However he has not been vengeful and treated with kindness those who had been unkind to him. Though he hailed from a semi-feudal family, his eternal link was with the man in the street. This was reflected in the way he died, which took place when he collapsed and passed away on a street in Wellawatte in Colombo.

The most fitting tribute one can make to this unsung social volunteer is not an appreciation of this kind, but to follow his footsteps and render selfless service towards the betterment of the dispossessed of our native soil.

Muttukrishna Sarvananthan.

Appointment in Canada

Mr. Siva Sivaramalingam of Scarborough has been appointed a member of the Council of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario for three years by the Lieutenant Governor of the Executive Council of Ontario.

Mr. Sivaramalingam is a Vice President of the Ontario Senior Tamils' Centre, Vice President for Society for the Aid of Ceylon Tamils and a member of the Board of Directors of Canada Ceylon Tamils Chamber of Commerce.

Federation of Saiva (Hindu) Temples UK

The above Federation which was recently inaugurated is organising a Saiva Conference on the 11th and 12th of July 1998 at the Lewisham Theatre, Rushey Green, Catford, London SE6. Saiva Educationists, Aatheena Karthaas from Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Europe are expected to take part in this conference.

Further details could be obtained from the various temples, Tamil Schools and Tamil Organisations.

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★ கொழும்புக்கு அர்ப்பணம் மிகுந்த உன்னத சேவை. (16 தினங்கள்) ★ தேயிலைப் பெட்டிகளிலிருந்து, முழு அளவிலான தனிப்பட்ட பொருள்கள் வரை. ★ கார், மற்றும் 20 அடி, 40 அடி முழு வர்த்தக சரக்குகளுக்கு விசேட கட்டணம். ★ மின்சார உற்பத்தி யந்திரம், யந்திர வகைகள், உபகரணங்கள். ★ சலவை யந்திரம், குளிர் சாதனப் பெட்டி போன்ற வீட்டுப்பாவனை மின்சார உபகரணங்களுக்கு வரிவிலக்கு.

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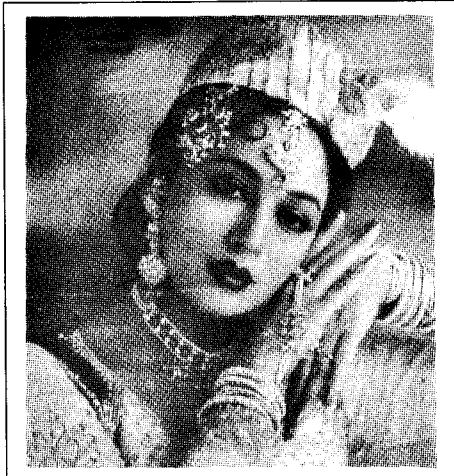
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